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## Parents and Educators Perspectives of Chronic Absenteeism: Strategies to Improve Attendance

Gloria Genene Woullard-Wilder  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Gloria Genene Woullard-Wilder

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2020

Abstract

Parent and Educator Perspectives of Chronic Absenteeism: Strategies to Improve Student  
Attendance

by

Gloria Genene Woullard-Wilder

MA, Notre Dame College of Ohio, 2002

BS, Notre Dame College of Ohio, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2020

## Abstract

The research problem for this study was the chronic absenteeism for students in Grades 1–3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in a Southern state. Chronic absenteeism (CA) can result in poor reading skills and high dropout rates for students in low-income areas. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of 6 parents, 6 educators, and 4 school support staff regarding the causes of CA in Grades 1–3 and recommendations to increase and sustain attendance.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory served as the framework. The research questions were used to identify causes of CA and suggestions for improving attendance. A purposeful sample of 10 school personnel, with 4 years’ experience in the district, and 6 parents, with 1 child enrolled in Grades 1-3, volunteered to participate in this study.

Thematic analysis using a priori and open codes was applied to semistructured interview data. Factors related to CA at home included lack of transportation, sickness, lack of means, poor motivation, indifferent attitudes, unsafe home environment, poor parental guidance, and homelessness/eviction. Factors related to CA at school included bullying, poor academic skills, and poor parent/teacher and teacher/student relationships.

Participants recommended school sponsored training sessions on building positive relationships between school and home and school bullying for parents and teachers, and information on community services to support parents and their children. These endeavors could contribute to positive social change if school and parental communities would work in partnership to increase and sustain daily attendance, resulting in improved Grades 1-3 students’ reading achievement and reduced dropout rates.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Mary Lou Chapman Woullard Wilson, my maternal grandmother, Lela Palmer Chapman Lang, and my maternal great grandmother, Alma Norman Palmer. Their examples as educators and courageous Black women provided the determination to reach my goal. Their faith in God's power gave me the confidence that was needed to pursue this study. Although they are no longer with me, I can still hear their words that guided and encouraged me throughout my journey to finish this doctoral study. Their voices kept me focused when I was tempted to give up before I reached the finish. I thank God for them, and I will forever love my "three mothers." To my baby son, Victor Edward Eugene Dunn, although you were only with me on earth for three short months, I love you and I will always remember you. I thank God for your brief time with me. Your brief time with me, your untimely death, and my ability to handle the loss provided the assurance that God's help will prevail when there are trials and tests of faith in my life.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	5
Purpose of the Study .....	7
Research Questions .....	7
Conceptual Framework.....	8
Nature of the Study .....	10
Definitions.....	12
Assumptions.....	13
Limitations .....	15
Significance.....	16
Summary.....	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	19
Literature Search Strategy.....	21
Conceptual Framework.....	22
Literature Review Related to Chronic Absenteeism.....	28
History of Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy.....	28
Chronic Absenteeism and International Concerns.....	30
Chronic Absenteeism and National Concerns .....	32
Chronic Absenteeism Related to Academic Achievement and Social Issues.....	49
Educators' Views on Chronic Absenteeism .....	57

Parent and Family Views on Chronic Absenteeism .....	59
Strategies and Interventions That Reduce Chronic Absenteeism .....	64
Summary and Conclusions .....	71
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	73
Research Design and Rationale .....	73
Role of the Researcher .....	75
Methodology .....	76
Participant Selection .....	76
Instrumentation .....	82
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	83
Data Collection .....	85
Data Analysis Plan.....	86
Trustworthiness.....	89
Ethical Procedures .....	90
Summary .....	93
Chapter 4: Results .....	94
Setting .....	94
Participants' Demographics .....	95
Data Collection .....	97
Data Analysis .....	98
Results.....	101
Findings Addressing RQ1.....	101
Findings Addressing RQ2 (Theme 3): Educating Parents and Teachers.....	109

Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	115
Summary .....	117
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations .....	118
Interpretation of Findings .....	118
Theme 1: Causes of Chronic Absenteeism for Students at Home .....	119
Theme 2: Causes of Chronic Absenteeism for Students at School.....	124
Theme 3: Educating Parents and Teachers .....	126
Limitations of the Study.....	132
Recommendations for Future Studies.....	133
Implications for Positive Social Change.....	134
Conclusions.....	135
References.....	137
Appendix A: Interview Protocol Document .....	157
Appendix B: A Priori Codes, Open Codes, Participants, and Excerpts for	
Research Question 1 .....	171
Appendix C: Open Codes, Categories, Participants, and Excerpts for Research	
Question 1 .....	173
Appendix D: A Priori Codes, Open Codes, Participants, and Excerpts for	
Research Question 2 .....	175
Appendix E: Open Codes, Categories, Participants, and Excerpts for Research	
Question 2 .....	177

## List of Tables

Table 1. Demographic Information for Six Educators and Four School Support Staff.... 96

Table 2. Demographic Information for the Six Parents ..... 97

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Chronic absenteeism, an early indicator of academic failure, has been a concern in the United States as far back as the 18th century. In 1852, Massachusetts first passed the Compulsory School Attendance Law, and by 1918, every state had followed suit with the intent to improve regular daily attendance for students aged 5 to 18 (Gleich-Bope, 2014; Snyder, Lee-Partridge, Jarmoszko, Petkova, & D’Onofrio, 2014). Nearly 10,000 schools in the United States have a 30% absentee rate (Attendance Works, 2017); 8 million students miss 18 days or 10% of school each year (Balfanz, 2016). Chronic absenteeism is a concern in the southern United States where this study took place and across the nation; therefore, there is a need to identify causes for inconsistent daily attendance, especially in schools where students fail to read on grade level by the third grade (Balfanz, 2016; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2015b).

Positive social change could be achieved when the reasons for inconsistent daily attendance of students in high-poverty areas are determined and solutions are found to address this issue. Results from this study may help policymakers to understand the causes of chronic absenteeism for students in Grades 1–3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school, which could lead to the implementation of new strategies to increase consistent daily attendance in similar schools across the United States. These strategies might also benefit schools around the world that are faced with chronic absenteeism, especially those in high-poverty areas or serving at-risk children.

Several studies have addressed chronic absenteeism and student achievement in Grades 1–3 (Komakech, 2015; McConnell & Kubina, 2014; USDE, 2015b, 2016a).

Researchers indicated that chronic absenteeism can lead to achievement deficits, including unsatisfactory reading skills and grade retention in the third grade, dropping out or failure to graduate, and juvenile crime (Aucejo & Romano, 2016; Sugrue, Zuel, & LaLiberte, 2016). Despite knowledge of the trends related to absenteeism, there is a lack of research regarding the reasons students in Grades 1–3 who attend high-poverty, low-performing schools continue to be chronically absent.

### **Background**

Researchers have shown that patterns of chronic absenteeism that begin in kindergarten and first grade are likely to continue in future years and can lead to achievement deficits (including failure to read on grade level by the third grade), grade retention, school dropout, and juvenile crime (Balfanz, 2016; Chang, Russell-Tucker, & Sullivan, 2016; Gottfried, 2015a; Nauer, 2016). Chronic absenteeism and truancy are global problems and are the cause of poor reading skills and dropout for students in low-income areas in Jamaica as well as Africa, Australia, and Europe (Birioukov, 2016; James & Davies, 2017; Mackie & MacLennan, 2015).

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 18 days or 10% of the school year and can begin in kindergarten (Balfanz, 2016; Gottfried & Kirksey, 2017; USDE, 2015b). A report released by Mississippi Kids Count (MKC) in 2015 showed that the absentee rate for students in K–12 in the state was 13% for the 2013–2014 school year (Royals, 2015) compared with 14.2% for the 2016–2017 year (Mississippi Department of Education [MDE], 2018). Allensworth and Evans (2016) pointed out that 1 in 10 kindergarten and first-grade students in the United States are chronically absent. This behavior can be

disadvantageous for students who are expected to read on grade level by the third grade (Royals, 2015). All students are now required to pass the 3rd Grade Reading Summative Assessment before they are promoted to the fourth grade (Wright, 2016). In Mississippi, the results for the 2017–2018 school year showed that nearly 35,000 third-grade students took the assessment; however, approximately 10% failed to meet the requirements for promotion (MDE, 2018). At the site where this research was conducted, the percentage was significantly higher: double that percentage.

The extant research that addresses chronic absenteeism has focused mainly on programs, strategies, and truancy laws for students in middle and high school who are likely to become delinquents and school dropouts (Conry & Richards, 2018; Mazerolle, Bennett, Antrobus, & Eggins, 2017; Rocque, Jennings, Piquero, Ozkan, & Farrington, 2017). Gottfried (2014) pointed out that chronic absenteeism in the early years has been “underdocumented” and “underresearched” (p. 1) for all students. Possible reasons for this lack of research might involve elementary schools’ “exclusive focus” (Gottfried, 2014, p. 56) on average daily attendance (ADA) rather than monitoring individual students who miss school. Gottfried explained the ADA provides the rate for the entire school; however, the daily absentee rate per student is overlooked.

Gottfried (2014) posited that the lack of research on the student’s early years might be due to unawareness of how chronic absenteeism as early as kindergarten can predict a pattern of chronic absence in later years. Gottfried hypothesized that the gap in research might be because researchers tend to study students in grades where standardized tests are more prevalent. London, Sanchez, and Castrechini (2016)

suggested that research on chronic absenteeism in the early grades is limited because many studies “focus on just one community” (p. 23) and on higher grade levels. Chang et al. (2016) explained that there is a need to focus on absences that occur as early as kindergarten and first grade, which could lead to weak reading skills by the third grade and truancy in later years. Truancy is not a part of this study; however, it should be noted because habitual chronic absenteeism in the early years frequently leads to dropping out of school (Rocque et al., 2017).

It is important to establish causes of chronic absenteeism in Grades 1–3, especially in high-poverty, low-performing schools, because it could be especially unfavorable for students who enter school with a lack of readiness skills (Balfanz, 2016; MDE, 2015). Students in parts of the South are not required to attend kindergarten; however, all schools are required to offer full-day kindergarten programs (MDE, 2015). Because students are not required to attend kindergarten, I focused on chronic absenteeism in Grades 1–3. The students in first grade in this study were those who attended a kindergarten program and those not enrolled in school for the kindergarten year.

In this study, I explored the perspectives of 16 participants (i.e., six parents and six educators of students in Grades 1–3 and four school support staff at a school in Mississippi that failed to have consistent daily attendance) regarding the causes of absenteeism and their suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance. A report from the MDE pointed out that when students miss school in kindergarten and first grade, they will not have success in reading on grade level by third grade (Wright, 2016). Hanson



and Lynch (2013) explained that students who lack proficiency in literacy skills in their early years are likely to continue with literacy deficits.

This study addressed a gap in the research regarding the reasons for chronic absenteeism among students in Grades 1–3 who attend high-poverty, low-performing schools. The results of the study provide reasons for chronic absenteeism as well as the participants' suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance at the research site and other high-poverty, low-performing schools, both nationally and globally, that serve at-risk children.

### **Problem Statement**

The research problem for this study was the chronic absenteeism for students in Grades 1–3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school. Chronic absenteeism has been described as promoting negative outcomes for learning, which can be like “bacteria in a hospital” (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p. 3) and can decrease valuable instructional time beneficial for improving grades in reading and standardized test scores (Balfanz, 2016; Jez & Wassmer, 2015).

Allensworth and Evans (2016) pointed out that nationally 10%, or 1 in 10, kindergarten and first-grade students are chronically absent. Research that has addressed chronic absenteeism has focused mainly on programs, strategies, and truancy laws for students in middle and high school who are likely to become delinquents and school dropouts (Conry & Richards, 2018; Dahl, 2016; Mallett, 2015; Mazerolle et al., 2017). Gottfried (2014) pointed out that chronic absenteeism in the early years has not been documented or researched for all students. Chang et al. (2016) explained that there is a

need to focus on absences that occur as early as kindergarten and first grade, which could lead to weak reading skills by third grade and truancy in later years.

In addition to higher than national absentee rates for chronic absenteeism, a large portion of third-grade students at the research site demonstrated below grade-level reading skills (Wright, 2016). The MDE (2018) noted that nearly 10%, or 1 in 10, of Mississippi's third-grade students failed to pass the 3rd Grade Reading Summative Assessment that allows students to be promoted to the fourth grade. Students in this state are falling behind their peers in academic progress.

There is a lack of data to determine the reasons why students in Grades 1–3 at high-poverty, low-performing elementary schools continue to have high absentee rates. Although specific reasons have not been identified, Gottfried (2014) suggested that the connection between chronic absenteeism and student achievement in the early years needs more investigation. This gap needs to be explored to determine the reasons students in the early grades who experience poverty and perform below academic standards continue to have high absentee rates, which may have a negative effect on academic achievement (Gottfried, 2014).

Studies (i.e., Amalu & Abang, 2016; Arthur, Patterson, & Bentley, 2014; Gottfried, 2015a, 2015b) and state reports (i.e., Royals, 2015; USDE, 2015a) on chronic absenteeism have indicated that a large number of students begin this pattern in their primary years. Chronic absenteeism among low-income children can be a barrier to achievement as early as preschool and the upper elementary grades (Gennetian, Rodrigues, Hill, & Morris, 2018; Susman-Stillman, Englund, Storm, & Bailey, 2018);

however; there is a lack of research on absenteeism for students in Grades 1–3. The research that does exist in this area has failed to address consistent daily attendance, including the reasons for this phenomenon, or provide suggestions for improving and sustaining attendance.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore, in-depth, the perspectives of six parents, six educators, and four school support staff regarding the causes of chronic absenteeism in Grades 1–3 at a high-poverty, low-performing school in Mississippi and their recommendations to increase and sustain attendance. Less than 10% of the third graders at the school selected for this research failed to pass the 3rd Grade Reading Summative Assessment used to promote students to the fourth grade. Chronic absenteeism has been linked to students' failure to read on grade level by the third grade, grade retention, truancy, and school dropout (Amalu & Abang, 2016; Balfanz, 2016). The participants' perspectives regarding the causes of inconsistent daily attendance and their recommendations and strategies to improve daily attendance may help to reduce chronic absenteeism in the early grades.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question (RQ) 1: What are the perspectives of parents, educators, and school support staff of the causes of chronic absenteeism in Grades 1–3 at a high-poverty, low-performing school as explored through ecological systems theory?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of parents, educators, and school support staff regarding recommendations to increase and sustain students' attendance in Grades 1–3?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The phenomenon that grounded this study was chronic absenteeism. I used the work of Balfanz and Byrnes (2012, 2018) and Balfanz (2016) on chronic absenteeism to provide a clear definition of the phenomenon: missing 18 days or 10% of school in a year. Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory, as well as scholarship on chronic absenteeism and students' relationships in the home and school environment, formed the conceptual framework for this study. In the literature review in Chapter 2, I will provide more detail on the conceptual framework as well as chronic absenteeism and its effects on academic achievement.

The conceptual framework for this basic qualitative study comprised Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory, which was used to explain influences on a child's development and personal growth. Bronfenbrenner's theory contains five environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The environmental system upon which this study focused was the microsystem; however, data from participants' interviews were analyzed with each of the five systems in mind to discover if any of them influenced the reasons why students in the elementary school in this study failed to have consistent daily attendance. Because of the influence of these environmental systems on the participants'

perspectives, I sought the participants' suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance.

The microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory is defined as the area where the child is the center of their environment—where the interactions with family, school, and teachers occur. Bronfenbrenner's microsystem involves the child's family and family attitudes, values, and beliefs, which might determine what will occur in the child's life, including factors that relate to daily attendance in school. Hanson and Lynch (2013) and Rosa and Tudge (2013) referenced Bronfenbrenner when they studied the relationships interactions that influenced a child's life. Within the microsystem, the parent's and teacher's daily interactions with the child could influence whether the child will have consistent attendance.

The mesosystem is the child's environment and consists of two microsystems that may be unrelated to the child's growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993). An event that occurs in the mesosystem, such as the child being away from school due to a death in the family, could be pertinent if it causes the child to have inconsistent attendance. Events in the exosystem of the child's environment are not directly involved with the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993); however, interactions in the exosystem, such as a parent's lack of employment or underemployment, might cause a financial hardship on the family and could cause them to live in a shelter or become homeless. The Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness (2015) pointed out that homeless students are likely to be absent. Green, DeFosset, and Kuo (2019) determined that students who change residences more than twice in a school year could be at risk for high absence rates.

The macrosystem of the child's environment involves the values, childrearing patterns, views of the child's early education, and beliefs of the family culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993). A child's pattern of consistent daily attendance could be affected if the parent is unaware of the negative outcomes of missing days in the early years and allows the child to be chronically absent. The events in the exosystem, such as a death of a family member, divorce, substance abuse, or a parent in jail, could cause a child to be transferred to another school, placed in a foster home, or housed with another family. The Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness (2015) noted that students who transfer to other schools, live in foster homes, or move in with relatives will have high absence rates.

The events that occurred in the child's environment represented in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) five ecological systems could have influenced the 16 participants' perspectives and the way that they responded to the open-ended interview questions regarding the most common causes of chronic absenteeism (related to RQ1). Analyses of the data were guided by the participants' perspectives of events that occurred in any of the five environments in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a basic qualitative research approach to explore the perspectives of 16 participants (i.e., six parents, six educators, and four school support staff) regarding the reasons students in Grades 1–3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi failed to have consistent daily attendance. The participants' suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance were also gathered. The four school support staff

included a secretary, data processor, social worker, and dropout prevention specialist (DOPS).

Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) five ecological systems theory formed the conceptual framework to help me analyze the responses from the 16 participants. I employed a basic qualitative research approach to capture the everyday experiences and perspectives of the participants in their own words (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) explained that the basic qualitative research approach "attempts to understand the meanings of experiences from the perspective of the participant" (p. 148). Lodico et al. pointed out that there are various ways to interpret the same experience by different participants. The key phenomenon for this study was chronic absenteeism in Grades 1–3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi.

Data were collected by conducting in-depth, one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions that allowed participants to respond freely (see Patton, 1987). I designed the in-depth interview process to elicit the interviewee's point-of-view, so the information necessary to answer the two RQs could be collected (see Patton, 1987). The interview protocol was based on and guided by Creswell's (2012) example. The protocol document contained the topic of the study; the time, date, and place of the interview; my name (as the interviewer); and the name and status of the interviewee (see Appendix A). The document also included the interview questions and space to write responses (see Creswell, 2012). Specific interview questions were listed separately for parents, educators, data processor, secretary, social worker, and DOPS. I had two professors at a

local college review the questions to make sure they were clear and would be helpful in eliciting answers/responses to the RQs.

I analyzed the data with a thematic approach, first with a priori codes and then with open codes. The a priori codes came from Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) five environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. I used a priori codes to search for recurring patterns of words, concepts, or phrases that fit within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Open codes involved reading the data; finding patterns in the data; dividing the data into segments; labeling the data; and examining the data for overlapping codes into categories, which were put into themes (see Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), data analysis procedures involve finding patterns and forming categories and themes. After the interviews, I asked the participants to review a summary of the study findings to check for the accuracy of the data. All participants agreed with the accuracy of the summary.

### **Definitions**

*Chronic absenteeism or inconsistent daily attendance:* According to Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), this translates to “missing 10% or more of school days” or “18 days a year” (p. 8), both excused and unexcused.

*Consistent daily attendance or regular attendance:* The student is in school each day at the designated start time, remains in class for instruction until dismissal, and misses 5 or fewer days a year (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).



*Truancy*: Action that includes unexcused absences, prolonged absenteeism, or unauthorized absences from school (by either parents or the institution) over a designated period of time (Strand, 2014).

### **Assumptions**

Leedy and Ormond (2010) explained that “assumptions are so basic that without them, the research problem itself could not exist” (p. 62). In this study, I assumed that all participants provided honest answers regarding their perspectives concerning chronic absenteeism and willingly offered suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance. Simon (2011) noted it was important that participants be asked to be truthful and should be assured that their responses and identities will be kept confidential. Honest answers were important to this study because they made the findings reliable. It was also assumed that all data were accurate and reliable because the participants volunteered for the study and were not pressed to answer questions during the interviews in addition to their responses being kept confidential and their identities being kept private.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this study included participants from two high-poverty, low-performing schools with students in Grades 1–3 in the state of Mississippi. The study was conducted at one elementary school with a population of approximately 500 students and an absentee rate that was significantly higher than the state average. A participant (i.e., a data processor) from another elementary school in the district with similar demographics was also involved in the study. I recruited the data processor by e-mail after the assistant principal at the first school declined the invitation to participate.

The delimitations of the study included a purposeful sample of 16 volunteers: six parents and six educators of students in Grades 1–3, a secretary, a data processor, a social worker, and the DOPS. Parents and educators of students in Grades 4–5 were not a part of the study because it focused on early childhood students in Grades 1–3. Parents and educators of kindergarten students were omitted because kindergarten is not required in Mississippi. Additionally, parents and educators of students in upper elementary, middle, and high school were excluded from the study.

I used the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory in this study with the primary focus on the microsystem, in which the child interacts with family and teachers. Rosa and Tudge (2013) used Bronfenbrenner's theory to explain violence and the inability of self-control. The relationships that occur in the microsystem have an influence on the child's development and personal growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993). Although I focused primarily on the microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's theory in this study, the data from the participants' interviews were also analyzed with the mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem in mind to evaluate if these systems influenced attendance or absenteeism.

I considered using the family systems model and the family adjustment and adaptation response model for this study but ultimately decided against their inclusion. The family systems model helps with understanding the roles and relationships of family members who have the responsibility of providing care for a child with a disability or developmental delay (Hanson & Lynch, 2013). This model was not selected because it did not fit the conceptual framework of this study. The family adjustment and adaptation

response model places focus on stressors that cause the family to make adjustments or adaptations to situations that occur within the family (Hanson & Lynch, 2013). I also rejected this model because it did not fit with the conceptual framework to help determine the reasons for chronic absenteeism.

The significance of this study findings depends on whether the reader can determine if the results are transferable to a similar area or situation (Anney, 2014). The high-poverty setting, number of participants, method of data collection, and interview questions should be presented clearly. Thick, rich descriptions are provided to help readers determine if the study fits their situation (see Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010).

### **Limitations**

The research design for this study on chronic absenteeism was limited to a basic qualitative approach with 16 participants in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi. A basic qualitative research approach can be a weakness because the data are collected, analyzed, and evaluated by one researcher (see Creswell, 2012). I was the sole researcher in this study, serving as scheduler and interviewer.

I acknowledged personal bias regarding this study because I believe parents are unaware of the negative outcomes linked to inconsistent daily attendance and how this affects their children's academic achievement. I followed Moustakas's (1994) guidance to be conscious of my personal opinions. As another precautionary measure to address my bias, I drafted open-ended interview questions and developed an interview protocol document, so I did not interject my thoughts or feelings into the interviews. The interview questions were reviewed by two professors at a local college to ensure they were clear

and adequate to answer the RQs. To refrain from expressing myself when interviewing the participants, I wrote my thoughts in the margin of the interview protocol document before, during, and after the interviews.

### **Significance**

This basic qualitative research study addressed a significant problem in a high-poverty, low-performing school in Mississippi where students are chronically absent each year. Chronic absenteeism is a national and international problem in high-poverty, low-performing schools and at this research site. Countries, such as Jamaica, and the continents of Africa, Australia, and Europe are faced with chronic absenteeism and truancy with low-income students (Amalu & Abang, 2016; Birioukov, 2016; James & Davies, 2017). Aucejo and Romano (2016) and Balfanz (2016) noted that nearly 8 million students in the United States are not consistently present in class for instructional time during the year. Balfanz demonstrated that chronic absenteeism in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and elementary grades could cause a decrease in academic achievement in later grades and school dropouts. Students who are chronically absent in the early grades could form a pattern of absenteeism in later years and might fail to read on grade level by the third grade (Balfanz, 2016; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

The MDE (2015) revealed that many third-grade students are chronically absent in high-poverty, low-performing elementary schools. The findings of this study provide insight into the reasons students in Grades 1–3 failed to have consistent daily attendance and may lead to positive social change with the implementation of new strategies and policies to increase consistent daily attendance at the research site. The new strategies for

attendance found in this study might also benefit schools around the world that are faced with the problem of chronic absenteeism in high-poverty areas or those serving at-risk children.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I provided an introduction and background information on chronic absenteeism and its potential influence on students' grade-level reading achievement by the third grade. The chronic absenteeism rate for students in Grades 1–3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi was described as the problem under study. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of six parents, six educators, and four school support staff regarding the causes of chronic absenteeism and gather their recommendations to increase and sustain students' attendance. Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory provided the conceptual framework for this study. The primary focus was on the microsystem, in which the child interacts with family and teacher; those interactions will either help or hinder consistent daily attendance for the child.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the literature search strategy and a review of the extant research that addresses the effects of chronic absenteeism and implications for student achievement and development. Literature on chronic absenteeism and the possible outcomes for students who are chronically absent will be explored. I will also discuss the link between chronic absenteeism and students' failure to read on grade level by the third grade, grade retention, truancy, school dropout, juvenile crime, substance abuse, physical

and mental health issues, school refusal and school phobia, and a low socioeconomic status during adulthood.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem addressed in this basic qualitative study was the chronic absenteeism of students in Grades 1–3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi. The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of 16 participants regarding the reasons these students failed to have consistent daily attendance and obtain their suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance. The participants included six parents, six educators, a secretary, a data processor, a social worker, and the DOPS. I originally recruited the assistant principal as 1 of the 4 school support staff; however, she declined to participate.

A review of the literature determined that chronic absenteeism is a national concern among young children and is an early indicator of students' failure to read on grade level by the third grade, grade retention, truancy, and dropout (Sugrue et al., 2016; USDE, 2015b, 2016a). Balfanz (2016) and Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) defined chronic absenteeism as missing 18 days or 10% of school in a year. National data indicated that 58% of U.S. schools have 10% of students who are chronically absent, the equivalent of nearly 8 million students each year (Attendance Works, 2018a). The MDE (2018) reported a 14.2% absentee rate in Mississippi; the elementary school where this study took place has a significantly higher rate (MKC, 2017). Studies have not been conducted to explore the causes of this problem.

A report from a California study (as cited in MKC, 2016) revealed that students who are chronically absent would not be proficient readers, specifically students who live in high-poverty areas. The report also noted that only 17% of students who were

chronically absent both in kindergarten and first grade were reading proficiently by Grade 3 (as cited in MKC, 2016). However, an estimated 64% of the students in the California study who had consistent daily attendance were reading on grade level by the third grade (as cited in MKC, 2016). Chronic absenteeism in Mississippi is linked to students' failure to read on grade level by the third grade (MKC, 2016). The MKC (2016) report noted that the overall ADA is valuable; however, individual student attendance data are needed to identify students who are at-risk for chronic absences.

Chronic absenteeism has been masked by the ADA rate that schools use to report daily attendance. A report from the Office of Civil Rights at the USDE (2016b) described ADA as the actual number of students who are in school or in a district each day as opposed to individual students who have daily attendance. Several studies revealed a link between chronic absenteeism and students' failure to read on grade level by the third grade, grade retention, future chronic absenteeism, school dropouts, unemployment, school refusal, delinquency, substance abuse, physical and mental health issues, and school phobia (Chang et al., 2016; Cook, Dodge, Gifford, & Schulting, 2017).

In this chapter, I outline the literature search strategy used, listing key terms and combinations of search terms. Next, the conceptual framework for the study and the review of the literature are presented. The literature review includes a history of chronic absenteeism and truancy, chronic absenteeism and international concerns, and national and state concerns (including truancy). Articles and reports on the statistics of chronic absenteeism in the state of Mississippi are also explored. The literature on chronic absenteeism related to academic achievements, social issues, and reading proficiency as



well as the viewpoints of educators, parents, and families are discussed. Finally, I review scholarship on interventions and strategies that have been effective for reducing chronic absenteeism.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

My search for peer-reviewed articles published within the past 6 years was primarily done in the research databases accessible through the Walden University Library, including Sage Premier and Educational Research Information Center. The multidisciplinary databases searched were ProQuest Central and Taylor and Francis Online. I also used PsycINFO, SocINDEX, and EBSCOhost databases to locate articles. Educational databases included Education Source and Education Resource Starter. Further searches were completed in Google Scholar. The literature review also consists of reports and statistics from the MDE, MKC, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the USDE; data from the 3rd Grade Reading Summative Assessment for Mississippi and the Mississippi State Legislature; and substitute teaching, teacher certification, and teacher shortage websites for the state.

I used the Boolean operators built into the search system of the databases as needed and employed the following key terms to search the literature: *absenteeism, attendance, chronic absenteeism, chronic absences and peer outcomes, consistent daily attendance, educators views and chronic absenteeism, inconsistent daily attendance, literacy and chronic absenteeism, parents and chronic absenteeism, parents and regular school attendance, parents attitude and chronic absenteeism, reading failure and third grade, reading on grade level, reading skills acquisition, regular daily attendance,*

*school attendance officers, student achievement, student development, student failure, substitute teachers, teacher attrition, teachers views and chronic absenteeism, teachers and regular school attendance, teacher licensure and certification, teacher qualifications, truancy, and truancy and school achievement.*

### **Conceptual Framework**

In this study, Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory provided a framework for the examination of the influences in a child's environment related to causes of chronic absenteeism. Bronfenbrenner's theory places the child in the center of several systems that influence growth and development: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each system is uniquely connected to the relationships in the child's environment that influence their well-being. The microsystem was the main system explored in this basic qualitative study.

The microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory is the immediate environment where the daily interpersonal relationships of family and child and teacher and child occur that influence student achievement and development. Hanson and Lynch (2013) used Bronfenbrenner's theory when they postulated that the family is considered the primary microsystem. The microsystem is the area where the child interacts with their family's beliefs and values and with teachers' attitudes concerning regular daily attendance. Based on Bronfenbrenner's theory, a child's interactions with family and teachers in the microsystem could have an influence on whether the child will have consistent daily attendance. I used Bronfenbrenner's theory to help answer RQ1 to provide a better understanding of the participants' perspectives

regarding the most common causes of chronic absenteeism for students in Grades 1–3 at the Mississippi school where the study was conducted.

The mesosystem consists of interactions in the child's microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993). Hanson and Lynch (2013) referenced Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) theory to describe the mesosystem as a series of microsystems that encompasses the immediate systems in which the child interacts. The microsystems within the child's mesosystem influence one another and work together or against one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993). A positive example would be a child's parent(s) being involved with their teacher and the school in a way that promotes their development and education. A negative example could be the child being absent from school due to a death in the family and missing key content in the lessons presented, which causes a delay in academic achievement.

The exosystem is the system that does not directly interact with the child or activities in a child's daily life; however, the events and/or decisions that occur in this system have an effect on the child's growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993). Bronfenbrenner (1986, 1992) explained that the exosystem is the area where decisions are made for the child that will influence the child's well-being, but the child is not directly involved or do they have a say in the decisions that are made. The exosystem consists of interactions with friends, family, neighbors, support groups, schools, churches, institutions (e.g., legal services), and the mass media, all of which can have a positive or negative effect on the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993). If an incident occurred in the exosystem, such as the child being placed in temporary foster care due to

domestic violence, it would be pertinent to this study if the displacement caused the child to have inconsistent daily attendance.

The macrosystem is the broad level of culture and subculture where the child lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993). In this system, the attitudes, ideas, values, and morals of the child's culture will have an influence on the systems that precede the macrosystem. Views regarding the child's early education, childrearing patterns, and education intervention policies are a part of the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986,1993). The macrosystem is the outermost level of the child's environment that is influenced by the child's culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993). The macrosystem is relevant to this study if the perspectives of the parents, educators, secretary, data processor, social worker, or DOPS concerning consistent daily attendance were founded on values or beliefs that conflict with strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism.

Lastly, Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory addresses the chronosystem, the fifth structure of the environment. The chronosystem involves environmental events, life transitions, and situations that might cause changes. These life events, which might consist of a death of a family member, divorce, or natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes) are ones that alter the child's life.

These five levels of the child's environment formed the conceptual framework for this study because the parents and teachers interviewed provided information on the child's home and school environment. I analyzed the data from all participants' interviews using the five systems to discover which system(s) influenced the reasons why students in Grades 1–3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in

Mississippi failed to have consistent daily attendance and to collect suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance.

Sugrue et al. (2016) conducted a study on chronic school absenteeism with students in Grades K–5 using Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) original ecological systems theory as the framework for “understanding and analyzing the influence of chronic absenteeism in the early grades ” (p. 137). They explored the results of an intervention model administered by an urban-suburban county in a large metropolitan area in the upper Midwest with a population of 1.199 million during the 2013–2014 school year. Sugrue et al. used the thematic analysis of data collected from interviews with 15 caseworkers and eight supervisors employed by the county to assist families in improving attendance. The purpose of their study was to improve understanding of the factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism. Sugrue et al. explained that there is a gap in the literature regarding reasons for chronic absenteeism in the early grades. Caseworkers who agreed to work with families were given 90 days to improve students’ attendance; however, students over 12 years old were referred to a truancy attorney (Sugrue et al., 2016).

The microsystem of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1986, 1993) refers to the relationship between family and school. Sugrue et al. (2016) noted that the relationships in the children’s microsystem hindered their ability to have consistent daily attendance. The caseworkers interviewed reported that family factors hindered consistent daily attendance and included “homelessness, lack of transportation, parents’ substance abuse, unable to manage a structural routine for a large number of children, and a child’s

refusal to attend school” (Sugrue et al., 2016, p. 139). The caseworkers expressed concern that poverty was linked to barriers that caused students to miss school.

The caseworkers interviewed by Sugrue et al. reported that poor relationships between students and teachers at the school microsystem were also responsible for the lack of consistent daily attendance. Sugrue et al. concluded that students did not value attending school because they perceived teachers were not attentive to their concerns. The students explained that teachers would judge them according to their siblings’ prior behavior problems. The results of their study indicated that interventions to decrease barriers, such as teachers’ inattention that discouraged students from attending school, would benefit families and increase consistent daily attendance.

I conducted the current study at a school with a different demographic from the research conducted by Sugrue et al. (2016). Students in the Sugrue et al. study represented a diverse population consisting of 61.2% African American, 15.7% Native American, 13.2% White 7.5% Hispanic, and 2.4 Asian. The school where the current study took place has approximately 500 students, and the overwhelming majority (i.e., nearly 100%) of whom are African American, live in public housing, and whose parents depend on public assistance for their livelihood.

Gottfried and Gee (2017) analyzed data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Kindergarten Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–2011 to investigate the multiple determinants of chronic absenteeism. They declared that their study was the first to explore chronic absenteeism and the negative consequences in the early years using a conceptual framework consisting of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human

development (i.e., Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development). Gottfried and Gee attempted to identify the reasons contributing to chronic absenteeism; however, they concluded that it is linked to multiple factors. They focused on three components of Bronfenbrenner's model: process, person, and context. Process represents the environments where children interact with other people, while person influences the learning environment of the child, shapes their attitude toward school, and influences whether the child has consistent daily attendance. The context of Bronfenbrenner's microsystem represents the interpersonal relationships in the child's immediate environment of family and school (Gottfried & Gee, 2017).

Gottfried and Gee (2017) noted that chronic absenteeism in the early years was not limited to one component and concluded the following:

- Children with asthma are 3.2 times more likely to be chronically absent.
- Children are more apt to be chronically absent when parents are not involved in their schooling.
- Children with few siblings or do not have older siblings to supervise younger ones to school tend to have more chronic absences.
- Children from lower socioeconomic populations have a higher risk of chronic absenteeism.

Gottfried and Gee (2017) suggested that future research could focus on grades other than kindergarten and that future studies might also correlate the number of siblings in a family to determine whether a larger number would decrease chronic absenteeism. Like Gottfried and Gee, chronic absenteeism was the focus of the current study; however,

in this study I examined this problem in Grades 1–3 from the perspectives of 16 participants. The current study was also focused on students in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi that failed to have consistent daily attendance as well as the participants' suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance.

### **Literature Review Related to Chronic Absenteeism**

The literature in this review was drawn from current studies, reports, and other sources that addressed chronic absenteeism and truancy and the negative outcomes for students and their peers. In this literature review, I addressed the history of chronic absenteeism and truancy, chronic absenteeism and international concerns, chronic absenteeism and national concerns, chronic absenteeism in Mississippi, chronic absenteeism and reading proficiency, educators' views on chronic absenteeism, parents' and families' views on chronic absenteeism, and strategies and interventions that reduce chronic absenteeism. A synthesis of these studies provided a broad range of information on chronic absenteeism and truancy in low-income areas as well as the methodology used by the authors who have approached this problem.

### **History of Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy**

The oldest school in America had students who missed school (Kennedy, 2019; Rogers, 2014). Rogers (2014) noted that as early as 1635, students in the Boston Latin School were truant. Truancy is one of the most serious problems for secondary schools in the United States (Rogers, 2014). Rogers explained that missing school has often been viewed as comical in American literature. During the early 1800s, Mark Twain portrayed



the problem as “playing hooky” (p. 185) in both *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Students’ absences from school were seen as fun and adventurous. Currently, chronic absenteeism and truancy have been associated with negative academic outcomes, such as student’s failure to read on grade level by the third grade, grade retention, dropping out of school, juvenile crime, poor physical and mental health, and a likelihood of living in an impoverished environment as adults (Childs & Grooms, 2018; Roby, Erickson, & Nagaishi, 2016; Rocque et al., 2017).

The problem of children missing quality instructional time in the United States dates as far back as 1852. In that year, the state of Massachusetts enacted the Compulsory School Attendance Law for students aged 8 to 14 as a way to improve school attendance (Gleich-Bope, 2014). Laws to decrease absenteeism were ratified in 32 additional states by 1900. By 1918, all states that had achieved statehood at the time had instituted laws that required all students to attend school regularly (Gleich-Bope, 2014; Kennedy, 2019).

Currently, all 50 states have a compulsory attendance law; however, each state has specific requirements for the number of days a student must attend school each year (Kennedy, 2019). Kennedy (2019) pointed out that parents have the responsibility to ensure their children attend school regularly, and parents are to be held “legally responsible” (p. 282) when their children are not attending school consistently. Gleich-Bope (2014) explained that compulsory laws have failed to reduce inconsistent daily attendance, which results in negative outcomes for students, families, schools, communities, and society.

### **Chronic Absenteeism and International Concerns**

Chronic absenteeism has also been a concern in countries other than the United States. James and Davies (2017) described school absenteeism and school dropout as a problem in South Wales since 1839. James and Davies's study explored the problem of absenteeism and its influence on elementary education in Victorian industrial Monmouthshire in South Wales from 1830-1865 to determine the reasons students continued to miss school for more than two centuries. James and Davies suggested that it is necessary to determine the reasons for chronic absenteeism and develop strategies to combat it as the problem continues.

Amalu and Abang (2016) conducted a descriptive survey research study to identify causes of school absenteeism and its effect on school performance with 320 primary school students in 16 schools in three senatorial zones in Cross River State in Nigeria. The random sample was obtained from 302,210 primary students using a multistage procedure to provide an equal chance of being selected. The data were obtained from a questionnaire with 15 items developed by Amalu and Abang. School attendance was identified as a problem in various grade levels; however, Amalu and Abang's study focused on students in the primary grades. The findings indicated that chronic absenteeism could be associated with poor academic achievement and school dropout.

Amalu and Abang (2016) suggested that chronic absenteeism in the primary grades could determine whether a child will be academically successful in future years and noted that parents and educators should work together to determine the causes and

relevant interventions. Amalu and Abang noted that regular attendance is essential for a student's success in school. Their survey to determine the reasons for school absenteeism is meaningful; however, no strategies were recommended to solve the problem in a child's early years. Although this current study also addressed chronic absenteeism, it used a basic qualitative approach and focused on at-risk students in Grades 1-3. The participants were from a single high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in the southern United States.

Rocque et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study to explore whether truancy in ages 12 through 14 is related to juvenile delinquency, unemployment, and health problems at ages 32 through 48. The study extended previous work that used data from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development conducted from 1961-1981 in Great Britain with 411 males aged 8 and 9 from a working-class area in London, England. Rocque et al. explained that the key to an improved life for students was to remain in school and avoid truancy. Rocque et al. suggested that consistent daily attendance in students' early years will provide a better chance for employment, decrease criminal acts of violence, and provide a more productive life in adulthood.

Van Breda (2013) conducted a mixed-method study in the Metro East Education District of the Western Cape in South Africa. The study explored the pattern of truancy in the eighth grade and offered recommendations for teachers who were experiencing the problem with students in their classrooms. Data were collected from 300 student-participants (50 males and females from each of the six schools), who filled out questionnaires. The principals from the six schools were also interviewed. The students

who participated were randomly selected after their parents had given consent, some of whom had as many as 100 days of absences.

Van Breda (2013) collected data from the questionnaire, which included 43 open-ended questions that focused on influences that might have caused the student to become truant. Negative influences at home and school were the factors that affected truancy, including (a) unstable homes; (b) low parental involvement; (c) parental unemployment; (d) single-parent households; (e) families' failure to value education; (f) teachers' lack of interest in or value of students' education; and (g) violence at home, school, and the community. A large percentage of the 300 students described the teachers' attitudes as a key reason for their refusal to attend school: 62.3 % reported that teachers did not have an interest in their education, and 64.3% stated that teachers neglected to provide needed attention. Van Breda suggested that effective strategies for reducing truancy should involve teachers' high expectations for students and a positive classroom environment where students feel valued, safe, and supported.

### **Chronic Absenteeism and National Concerns**

Chronic absenteeism is linked to a failure to read on grade level by the third grade, grade retention, truancy, school dropout, juvenile crime, underemployment, unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, and a shorter life expectancy (Parr & Bonitz, 2015; Rocque et al., 2017; Skedgell & Kearney, 2018). Studies on chronic absenteeism indicated that nearly 8 million students in K-12 in the United States are chronically absent from school each year (Balkis, Arslan, & Duru, 2016; Gottfried & Kirksey, 2017; Jacob & Lovett, 2017). A review of the literature showed that consistent student

attendance is also linked to future achievement and high school graduation and may result in negative outcomes regarding students' social and educational success (Balfanz, 2016).

Balfanz and Byrnes (2018) noted that chronic absenteeism continues to be a problem in New York City, the nation's largest school system, with 1.1 million students in 1,700 schools. New York City schools are largely urban, with 72% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch programs; 62% are from minority backgrounds. To combat chronic absenteeism, Mayor Bloomberg led a task force in early 2010 when chronic absenteeism in the 2007-2008 school year increased to more than 90,000 students in Grades K-5 (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018). Data were collected for 3 years and focused on the 2012-2013 school year. The use of data to measure and monitor attendance was effective in identifying students who were chronically absent; however, the task force was unsuccessful in finding the causes of chronic absenteeism. Students in New York City were rewarded with gift certificates, and special privileges or calls were made to the student's home to improve consistent daily attendance. The results from Balfanz and Byrnes's study showed that chronically absent students who received incentives attended an additional 9 days of school each year.

A report conducted by Attendance Works (2017) indicated that there could be a reversal of the high rates of chronic absenteeism across the country when the community collaborates with educators to provide the needed support and resources. Chronic absenteeism is a problem in all 50 states regardless of whether the setting is rural, town, suburban, or urban (Attendance Works, 2017). Low-income students demonstrate a

significantly higher rate of chronic absenteeism, with 9,921 schools having more than 30% of students listed as chronically absent (Attendance Works, 2017). Excessive absenteeism in the United States can be as high as 29%, with chronic absences often more prevalent in urban low-income areas (Attendance Works, 2017).

A quantitative study by Lenhoff and Pogodzinski (2018) on chronic absenteeism and the effect of the child's environment on attendance suggested that students in Grades K-12 who fail to attend school consistently struggle academically and are at risk for poverty in adulthood. Lenhoff and Pogodzinski conducted their study using school-level scores and 5Essential surveys to identify school-based factors that contributed to chronic absenteeism in Detroit. The data collected could then be used to implement interventions, programs, and training with the Detroit Public Schools Community District with district leaders as partners to decrease absenteeism in Grades K-12. Lenhoff and Pogodzinski suggested that family income alone did not predict a high percentage of absenteeism, but that school safety and personal health were factors that could influence this behavior.

The microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory, upon which this conceptual framework is based, is the environment where the child's interactions with family and school occur. Lenhoff and Pogodzinski (2018) referred to Bronfenbrenner's theory and explained that there is a link between the child's interaction in the microsystem and school attendance. The child's relationships in the microsystem will have an influence on whether the child cannot attend, will not attend, or does not attend school consistently (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Although Balfanz and Byrnes

(2012) gave three broad reasons why students fail to attend school, they did not provide specific reasons why students do not have consistent daily attendance.

Balfanz and Byrnes's (2018) and Lenhoff and Pogodzinski's (2018) studies on chronic absenteeism in New York and Detroit differ from this qualitative study, which was conducted in a single high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi with a population of approximately 500. One hundred percent of the students at this school participate in a free reduced lunch program, live in public housing, and their families receive public assistance as their livelihood. Nearly all students are African American. This study explored the reasons students in Grades 1-3 at this school failed to have consistent daily attendance as well as the suggestions of the participants to improve this pattern.

Current research links chronic absenteeism with students at risk for academic failure, particularly in the area of third-grade reading achievement (Balfanz, 2016; Chang et al., 2016; Nauer, 2016). Working with the Consortium on School Research at the University of Chicago's Urban Education Institute, Allensworth and Evans (2016) explored the frequency of absenteeism and the consequences of inconsistent attendance with 1800 students at four charter schools in Chicago's South Side. Between 10% and 15% of students in these schools, which served Grades pre-K through 12, were chronically absent in a school year. Allensworth and Evans's longitudinal study covered a decade of research on the relationship between attendance and course failure and the consequences of chronic absenteeism throughout Chicago's schools. The four Chicago charter schools had a goal to improve attendance by 98%; only 4 missed days per year for

each child. Eighty percent of students were from low-income families who faced challenges that can affect consistent daily attendance.

Allensworth and Evans (2016) explained that monitoring attendance requires consistent communication with teachers, parents, and students to stress the importance of consistent daily attendance. Collaboration between parents and teachers could be effective in improving attendance. Allensworth and Evans also suggested seeking the perspectives of counselors and members of school governing boards to improve absenteeism in Chicago charter schools. Inconsistent attendance is linked to weak reading skills in the early grades and was a predictor of failure to graduate from high school. Allensworth and Evans recommended a need for researchers to conduct studies at different locations to determine the causes of chronic absenteeism and develop strategies to improve attendance. Based on these recommendations, I conducted a study to explore the perspectives of 16 participants regarding reasons students in Grades 1-3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school have inconsistent daily attendance as well as their suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance. The majority of the students were born to single teenage mothers, live in public housing, and came from families who depend on public assistance for their livelihood.

The problem of chronic absenteeism prompted President Obama, through the My Brother's Keeper Initiative, to address chronic absenteeism (Chang et al., 2016; USDE, 2015a, 2016a). The initiative solicited states and local communities and encouraged them to use strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism by at least 10% each year, beginning in the 2015-2016 school year (USDE, 2015a). The report, issued during the Obama



Administration, noted that students who are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade might not be able to read on grade level by the third grade (USDE, 2015a). The report concluded that students who are chronically absent have a risk of falling behind their peers and becoming school dropouts, and that there is a need to educate parents on the negative outcomes of chronic absenteeism regarding school achievement and quality of life in adulthood (USDE, 2015a). This current study provided the opportunity for six parents, six educators, a secretary, a data processor, a social worker, and the DOPS to focus on the issue of chronic absenteeism to address this problem. The participants communicated their perspectives regarding consistent daily attendance and offered suggestions for increasing and sustaining this behavior.

Researchers (Balfanz, 2016; Chang et al., 2016; Gottfried & Kirksey, 2017; Nauer, 2016) approached the problem of chronic absenteeism and provided numerical data to show how many students across the nation are chronically absent. The numerical data in studies by Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) and Balfanz (2016) highlight the importance of studies on chronic absenteeism. Balfanz noted that chronic absenteeism is a significant problem in 146 of New York City schools where students in Grades K-12 missed 40% of school in the 2009-2010 through 2012-2013 school years. The data also showed many students had missed more than the required 180 days in a school year (Balfanz, 2016).

Balfanz's (2016) study provided evidence that chronic absenteeism in pre-K, kindergarten, and primary grades is linked to low academic achievement and puts students at risk for dropping out of school and committing juvenile crimes. Chronic

absenteeism could also be a predictor of the school-to-prison pipeline (Rubino, Anderson, & Campbell, 2020). Rubino et al. (2020) inferred that students who are chronically absent with racial and ethnic differences have a higher risk of committing juvenile crimes, which could lead to incarceration. Balfanz noted that students in high-poverty areas have a wider achievement gap for school success when they are chronically absent in the earlier grades; therefore, the causes of chronic absenteeism need to be addressed.

Data in the current basic qualitative research study were collected from participants' interviews to determine the reasons for chronic absenteeism in an elementary school, as opposed to numerical data that give the number of days that individual students are absent. The results from the findings of this study could help policymakers to implement strategies to improve attendance.

Goodman (2015) conducted a study on chronic absenteeism with elementary and secondary students at 350 Massachusetts schools. The data were from 2003-2010 when schools had to be closed due to snow days. The data included students' scores in mathematics and English language arts from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System given yearly in Grades 3-8 and in Grade 10. Goodman reported a higher absentee rate with low-income and minority students who participated in the free lunch program. A student's absence, which involved the snow days, reduced instructional time. Although weather conditions contributed to a loss in instructional time, Goodman explained that chronic absenteeism, not the weather, influenced the students' test scores.

Chronic absenteeism can start as early as kindergarten (Allensworth & Evans, 2016; Chang et al., 2016; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Nauer, 2016), but can occur as early as

preschool and pre-K (Allison & Attisha, 2019; Ehrlich, Gwynne, & Allensworth, 2018; Ehrlich et al., 2013; Gottfried, 2015b; McDermott, Rikoon, & Fantuzzo, 2016). Allison and Attisha (2019) suggested a pattern of absences with students in preschool and kindergarten might lead to disadvantageous school performance in future grades and school dropout. Allison and Attisha also pointed out that chronic absenteeism in preschool and kindergarten differs between states and schools and is determined by income, race, and ethnicity.

In an earlier significant study, Ehrlich et al. (2013) revealed that a pattern of chronic absenteeism in preschool could lead to inconsistent daily attendance in kindergarten and later grades. Ehrlich et al. conducted a study in 2011-2012 with 25,000 students aged 3 and 4 in the Chicago public schools. They found that 50% of the 3-year-olds and 33% of the 4-year-olds were chronically absent. Children who are chronically absent for several years are likely to have low reading skills by the second grade and need intervention. Ehrlich et al. suggested that African American students are more likely to be chronically absent than any other race or ethnicity due to high-poverty levels. They also found that African American preschool absences were due to sickness, transportation to and from school, and problems with childcare. Ehrlich et al. noted that collaboration with parents, the Chicago Public Schools, and the Office of Early Childhood were needed to address issues of chronic absenteeism in preschool to improve attendance.

Ehrlich et al. (2018) also conducted a study that showed chronic absenteeism continues to be common in U.S. schools and suggested that the pattern of absences that exist with pre-K students will usually persist in kindergarten and the later grades.

Students who have patterns of absences for several years are likely to require assistance to become proficient readers by Grade 3 (2018).

Studies by London et al. (2016), McConnell and Kubina (2014), and the USDE (2016a) on chronic absenteeism suggested that students who miss important time from school are at risk for poor educational outcomes. London et al. determined that chronic absenteeism had negative effects on student achievement in a San Francisco Bay area community with students in Grades K-8. The students in the study were divided into four groups by grade levels. The first group involved students in Grades K-2, the second group included Grades 3-4, and the third consisted of students in Grades 5-6. The fourth group was middle school students in Grades 7-8. The students' chronic absenteeism and academic records were tracked for 3 academic years: 2008-2009 to 2010-2011 (London et al., 2016). The students' records were matched as they moved from elementary to middle and to high school to determine a pattern of chronic absences with achievement data. The data for attendance for all students showed whether students were present, tardy, or absent. The achievement scores used were English language arts scores from the California Standards Test. The results from the study showed that chronic absenteeism that started in kindergarten recurred in the following years (London et al., 2016).

London et al. (2016) conducted their longitudinal quantitative study with kindergarten students who were 69% Latino, 23% White, and 8% other ethnicities. The students were English language learners; 55% received free or reduced lunches from school. London et al. pointed out that demographics, such as diversity of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and parents' education levels, might have contributed to the

findings of their study on chronic absences and its consequences on student achievement. Although the study focused on chronic absenteeism and the negative outcomes for student achievement in a community in the San Francisco Bay area, London et al. suggested that studies in other parts of the country with different populations are needed to document the reasons students fail to attend school consistently.

London et al. (2016) suggested that causes for chronic absenteeism might vary in different locations with different races. Students who are African American, Native American, and Pacific Islander, and have disabilities have the highest rate of chronic absenteeism. Latinos and English language learners show the highest increase in chronic absenteeism from the early to later years; whereas, low-income students are likely to have more absences overall. Factors that contribute to absenteeism and student achievement might be interrelated; however, these factors have not been explored in depth. London et al. recommended that future qualitative research is needed to document the reasons why children of all ages are missing school, even with interventions to improve daily attendance. London et al. suggested that studies need to be conducted to understand the best interventions for chronic absenteeism for students in all grades. This current qualitative research study on chronic absenteeism was conducted following the recommendation of London et al. The demographics for this study differed, however, as the research site was in Mississippi and consisted of almost 100% African American students in Grades 1-3, all of whom were English speaking.

Consistent daily attendance influences the probability that students will become proficient readers by the end of the third grade (Balfanz, 2016; Nauer, 2016). Nauer

(2016) conducted a study at a New York elementary school to monitor ADA. Many schools will track ADA as the percentage of students present on a given day; however, there is often a lack of attention given to individual student's absences in the early childhood years (London et al., 2016; Mahoney, 2015). Nauer's longitudinal study involved students in Grades K-8 over 3 academic years (2010-2011 to 2012-2013) and addressed absenteeism and test scores. The study focused on 100 elementary school principals in a pilot study from 2010 until 2013 who had used ADA for the entire school and had overlooked students' daily attendance to monitor chronic absenteeism. Nauer explained that principals should be aware that attendance is more than a way to increase the school's budget. Principals should also understand that consistent daily attendance is beneficial for an individual student's academic achievement and as a measure to increase the school's yearly performance, especially in high-poverty schools.

Nauer (2016) reported that a small elementary school in a Jamaican subdivision of Queens, New York, had a 33% absentee rate for the 2010-2011 school year, the year a new principal was employed. The school had four principals in 7 years, and the educators at the school were dissatisfied with the constant change in leadership. The school's population consisted of Black and Hispanic students from low-income, single-parent households. Nauer explained that students' refusal to attend school attributed to the high percentage of absenteeism. One of the new principal's strategies to improve attendance was offering weekly and monthly incentives for improved attendance. At the end of the 2012-2013 school year, the absentee rate had decreased to 17%. Nauer suggested that poor attendance could determine whether a child is reading on grade level by the third

grade. Nauer noted that there is a need to find out why students do not come to school consistently in elementary years. This current research was conducted on chronic absenteeism; however, the location, population, and participants differed from Nauer's study.

Researchers have shown that students with regular attendance in the early years can acquire better reading skills (Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Gupta & Lata, 2014). Gupta and Lata (2014) pointed out that starting in kindergarten, students with consistent daily attendance will show better reading test scores than students who are chronically absent. Gupta and Lata focused their study on students in elementary and secondary schools rather than those in the early years. Gottfried and Gee (2017) strongly suggested that addressing chronic absenteeism with young students will require other approaches to identify key reasons for this problem. The current study aligned with Gottfried and Gee's research and explored the reasons students in Grades 1-3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school failed to have consistent daily attendance as well as documented the participants' suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance.

Chronic absenteeism has been investigated in several states to improve attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Jacobsen, Meeder, & Voskull, 2016). According to a report from Attendance Works (2014), eight states have explored patterns of students who were chronically absent. Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Maryland, Oregon, Utah, and Rhode Island attempted to reduce chronic absenteeism by implementing strategies to increase consistent daily attendance and improve student achievement; however, chronic absenteeism still exists nationally (Attendance Works, 2014).

Gee (2018) conducted a qualitative study to explore absences in children from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds to close the gap in disparities that cause chronic absenteeism. The study focused on the challenges that hindered consistent daily attendance with children across the United States. Gee proposed that there is a need to close the disparities in attendance gap for children of color in public elementary, middle, and high schools. According to Gee, African American and Native American students have as much as 7% higher absentee rates than White students. Gee described the disparity in chronic absenteeism as challenging; however, the root causes have not been identified. Gee recommended that data should be collected from several states to determine the reasons and disparities that hinder consistent daily attendance. Gee declared that reducing chronic absenteeism could close the gap in student achievement.

Researchers have conducted studies on chronic absenteeism in low-income areas of the United States, consistent with the scope of this study (Childs & Grooms, 2018; Gee, 2018; Gennetian et al., 2018; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Susman-Stillman et al., 2018). There is a need for research on chronic absenteeism as missing 18 days or 10% of school in a year has negative outcomes for students, especially those who live in high-poverty neighborhoods (Erickson, 2018; Susman-Stillman et al., 2018). Additional research demonstrated that chronic absenteeism could result in negative outcomes such as grade retention, failure to read on grade level by the third grade, school dropout, truancy, juvenile offenses, and the likelihood low-income status in adulthood (Gentle-Genitty, Karikari, Chen, Wilka, & Kim, 2015; Havik, Bru, & Ertesvag, 2015).



Chronic absenteeism could also be a negative influence on classmates. Gottfried (2015b) explained that students who are part of a class where their peers are chronically absent would not get the full benefit of instructional time from their teachers. Weinberger and Forbush (2018) noted that teachers spend quality instructional time repeating missed lessons, which leads to “delayed instructions” (p. 80) for students who have consistent daily attendance. Weinberger and Forbush explained that chronic absenteeism has a negative educational effect on all students in the classroom.

The studies on chronic absenteeism with low-income students have focused mainly on programs, strategies, and truancy laws for students in middle and high school who are likely to become delinquents and school dropouts (Conry & Richards, 2018; Mazerolle et al., 2017). The review of the literature revealed that studies had been conducted on chronic absenteeism in various grades. Studies to determine strategies and interventions to reduce chronic absenteeism are meaningful; however, there is a lack of research regarding low-income students in Grades 1-3 and the causes of chronic absenteeism as well as suggestions to improve and sustain attendance. Allensworth and Evans’s (2016) study focused on students in ninth grade; Gennetian et al. (2018) studied the transition of students in fourth, seventh, and ninth grades; and Gottfried’s (2015b) and Gottfried and Kirksey (2017) studies involved students in the third and fourth grades. Dahl (2016) explored the reasons for truancy from the perspectives of adults aged 18 through 35 who were truant as students.

Researchers agree that chronic absenteeism has negative outcomes for students and their peers (Gottfried, 2015b; Weinberger & Forbush, 2018). The literature shows

there is a need for studies to address the reasons for chronic absenteeism in the early years. Gottfried (2015b) pointed out that chronic absenteeism in these years has not been adequately documented or researched. Chang et al. (2016) explained that there is a need to focus on reading skills by the third grade as well as truancy in later years. The results of this current study regarding the reasons students in Grades 1-3 failed to have consistent daily attendance and suggestions to improve this condition can be used to benefit schools globally that are faced with this problem, those in high-poverty areas, or those serving at-risk children.

### **Chronic Absenteeism in Mississippi**

The problem of chronic absenteeism is widespread in the state of Mississippi. A report from MKC (2017) revealed that 13% of students were chronically absent in the 2014-2015 school year; however, a more recent report showed the absentee rate had increased to 14.2% for the 2016-2017 school year (MDE, 2018). A large number of students enter school far behind their peers in literacy skills. Chronic absenteeism may contribute to the decline in the mastery of reading skills in future years (Gottfried, 2014).

A report by Royals (2015), using data from the MKC, concurred with a study by Gottfried (2014), which noted that a high rate of chronic absenteeism is an indicator of continued low student achievement. Skinner (2015) showed that some 38,000 students in Mississippi took the 3rd Grade Reading Summative Assessment, which is given to determine whether students have mastered reading skills on a third-grade level. Skinner determined, however, that more than 5,000 third graders could have been held back

during the 2014-2015 school year for poor reading skills. Students who failed to pass the assessment would not be promoted to fourth grade (2015).

Attendance in school matters as chronic absenteeism has a negative effect on student achievement (Cook et al., 2017; Gottfried, 2014, 2015a). A report by MKC (2016) pointed out that 60% of third-grade students failed to succeed in school. Chronic absenteeism increased from 13% in the 2014-2015 school year to 14.2% in 2016-2017 (MDE, 2018). MKC also reported that the pattern of missing school starts as early as September in a school year. It is important to understand why students in Grades K-3 at the elementary school selected for this research have a chronic absenteeism rate higher than the average for the state of Mississippi.

Chronic absenteeism is especially prevalent in kindergarten students in Mississippi (Skinner & Kieffer, 2014). Skinner and Kieffer's (2014) report for the MDE noted that enrollment in kindergarten is not required in this state; however, students who are enrolled are expected to attend consistently. MKC (2017) reported that 12.9% of kindergarten students were chronically absent in the 2014-2015 school year. Skinner and Kieffer explained that a large number of families do not consider kindergarten to be essential for gaining readiness skills. The school days missed are due to the parents' choice not to enroll the child in kindergarten and could result in low reading skills (Royals, 2015).

The findings from Skinner and Kieffer's (2014) report showed that as many as 2300 of Mississippi's kindergarteners were absent from school daily. A 2015 report from the MDE revealed that almost 75,000 of the state's K-12 public school students were

chronically absent in 2013-2014 (Royals, 2015). Chronic absenteeism is a problem for Mississippi's schools as a large number of students have not successfully reached levels that will help them to be fluent readers by the third grade (MKC, 2016; Royals, 2015). Skinner and Kieffer and the MDE noted that the percentage of students who failed to read on grade level by the third grade is linked to chronic absenteeism; however, no reasons for chronic absenteeism were provided in their reports. Chronic absence among students matters, as this lack of attendance widens the achievement gap.

The report from MKC (2016) revealed that absence patterns as early as September could indicate the student will continue this behavior during the school year. The state superintendent of education in Mississippi explained that chronic absenteeism is a community issue, and the community should provide resources for students in high-poverty, low-performing areas who face challenges that might cause inconsistent daily attendance (Mannie, 2016). The superintendent suggested that poverty is linked to chronic absenteeism, which might lead to low test scores on the 3rd Grade Reading Summative Assessment, which allows students to be promoted to the fourth grade (Mannie, 2016). MKC reported that students who missed more than 3 days before they took the 2013 National Assessment for Education Progress reading exam scored 12 points lower than students who had consistent daily attendance. The state superintendent recommended strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism in the classroom, such as informing students of the importance of being in school; calling students' home on the day that the student misses school; and acknowledging that students in high-poverty, low-performing areas face challenges in school (Mannie, 2016).

The report from MKC (2016) concluded that parents, schools, and communities should collaborate to improve school attendance for children in that state. The report noted that the earlier absences are identified, the more proficient in reading students will become. The report also recommended that studies should be conducted to determine the reasons why students are missing school in Mississippi (MKC, 2016). The number of students who are chronically absent is meaningful as the school in this study should address reasons for this problem, which has been linked to students' failure to read on grade level by the third grade (Balfanz, 2016; Wright, 2016). The findings from this research also provide reasons why nearly one fifth of the third-grade students at the school in this study failed to pass the 3rd Grade Reading Summative Assessment (Wright, 2016). Students who failed to pass the assessment are in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school where a large number of students are chronically absent.

### **Chronic Absenteeism Related to Academic Achievement and Social Issues**

Chronic absenteeism is associated with unfavorable outcomes for students and their peers in the classroom (Gottfried, 2015b; Weinberger & Forbush, 2018). Gottfried (2015b) conducted a longitudinal descriptive statistics study in an East Coast urban district with 23,000 students in third and fourth grades to compare the differences between students who attended school consistently and those who were chronically absent. Gottfried explained that when students were chronically absent, teachers would often have to repeat lessons that had been previously taught to explain skills to students who missed school. For this reason, Gottfried suggested that peers perform worse when they are in a classroom with students with high absenteeism. Gottfried also found that

there was an effect on peers' standardized test scores with negative outcomes in reading and math when the students had classmates who were chronically absent. Gottfried noted there should be a focus on chronic absenteeism with students in the early grades to identify reasons for this behavior. Although third-grade students were involved in Gottfried's study, no reasons were not specified for chronic absenteeism in the East Coast urban district.

Similarly, Gupta and Lata (2014) and Weinberger and Forbush (2018) found that reviewing lessons, for the sake of elementary and secondary students who are chronically absent, wastes the teacher's time. Teachers will alter the time allotted for teaching new skills when they review for students who have missed prior lessons. Gupta and Lata noted that the extra work that teachers have to do to accommodate students who are chronically absent could slow the academic progress for students who attend consistently and are ready to move forward. Jez and Wassmer (2015) and London et al. (2016) noted that there are negative outcome correlations between student achievement and missing classes

Jez and Wassmer (2015) used regression analysis and a data set drawn from California's elementary schools to evaluate the relationship between quality learning time and student achievement. Findings from the study suggested that increased time on tasks in the classroom could lead to improved student achievement with elementary students in California schools. Jez and Wassmer explained that the more time that students are involved in learning, the greater the academic achievement. Missing quality instructional time consists of arriving late for class, leaving before dismissal time, or being absent

from class for any reason (Gupta & Lata, 2014; London et al., 2016). London et al. (2016) explained that any amount of time away from class results in a missed opportunity to learn. Gupta and Lata (2014) stated that beginning in kindergarten, students with consistent daily attendance would show better reading test scores than students who are chronically absent. This study, however, focused on students in elementary and secondary schools rather than students in the early years.

Research has shown that a pattern of chronic absenteeism that begins in the early grades could lead to truancy. Truancy occurs with older students and can result in unfavorable outcomes such as juvenile crime, alcohol and substance abuse, failure to graduate from high school, shorter life-expectancy, underemployment, and unemployment (Allen, Diamond-Myrsten, & Rollins, 2018; Maynard et al., 2017; Skedgell & Kearney, 2018).

Truancy can also have negative effects on students' education with harmful outcomes for the community. Rogers (2014) linked truancy to juvenile delinquency and the court system. According to Rogers, truancy is a student's refusal to attend school and affects the community inasmuch as it causes high crime rates, substance abuse, increased unplanned pregnancies (adding to the welfare rolls), and a larger number of unskilled workers. Truancy can be due to problems in the home and includes lack of transportation to and from school as well as physical and mental health problems (Allen et al., 2018; Eunjung, Davis, So, & Chen, 2019; Rogers, 2014). The lack of a permanent resident, substance abuse, and unplanned pregnancies were also reasons for truancy (Allen et al., 2018; Eunjung, et al., 2019). Allen et al. (2018) pointed out that truancy has an

unfavorable effect on graduation, income in adulthood, and may also be a predictor of short life expectancy.

Eunjung et al. (2019) conducted a study with students aged 6 through 17 to examine the effect of asthma and the use of an inhaler on attendance. Multivariable logistic regressions were used and involved race/ethnicity, family income, availability of medical insurance, and whether the family was English speaking. The results showed that children were more at risk of being chronically absent when an inhaler had to be used for asthma.

Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, and Cauffman (2014) conducted a longitudinal study using month-level data for 6,636 months with 1,354 delinquent adolescents (13.5% female) who had been suspended, expelled, or voluntarily truant for various degrees of school infractions where a zero-tolerance policy had been implemented since the 1990s. Students involved in the study were 41.5 % Black, 33.5% Hispanic-American, and 20.2% White. The purpose of the study was to determine whether being suspended or expelled from school would increase the likelihood that students would be involved with the juvenile justice system. Monahan et al. compared students who were forced to miss school and those students who were truant and determined that school suspension or expulsion might cause more students to be involved in juvenile crime.

Truancy has not been well researched from the perspectives of the truants (Dahl, 2016). Dahl (2016) conducted a study with 17 males and 17 females aged 18 through 25 to explore former truants' activities when they were absent from school. Dahl's study was conducted to fill the gap in the literature by interviewing young adults who were from



different geographical areas. The qualitative study consisted of semistructured interviews; The findings showed females and males were equally truant, and that truancy was influenced both by the school and home environments. Dahl suggested that truants skipped school to eat with friends during lunch, avoid specific teachers and classes, and help in single-parent households. Students also skipped school to smoke marijuana with friends. Dahl recommended that further studies need to be conducted in homes and schools to address the reasons for truancy.

Truancy may be connected to a deficit in academic achievement and a likelihood of dropping out of school (Zalaznick, 2015). Zalaznick (2015) focused on 15 school districts in and around San Antonio, Texas, to improve attendance and master the Common Core. According to Zalaznick, the new Common Core curriculum is more effective for students when they have consistent daily attendance and suggested that districts need to design programs to tackle truancy and bring students back to school. The district leaders of the community implemented strategies to decrease truancy in the 15 school districts by requiring parents of truant students to attend parenting classes having Exterminators from a pest control company handed out magnets on chronic absenteeism and posted information on absenteeism in taxis. Zalaznick noted that the older methods of addressing truancy were not effective; therefore, a study needed to be conducted to determine the specific reasons why students in these school districts failed to come to school. This current research on absenteeism differs from Zalaznick's study on truancy in location, students' grade levels, and the number of schools studied.

### **Chronic Absenteeism and Reading Proficiency**

Learning to be a proficient reader is the foundation for academic success (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The landmark study by Snow et al. (1998) is demonstrated that reading on grade level by the end of the third grade can be the best predictor of school achievement. Snow et al. concluded that students who are proficient readers by the third grade are more likely to graduate from high school. Current studies have also shown that acquisition of reading skills in Grades K-3 are necessary for students to become proficient readers (Hemmerechts, Kavadias, & Agirdag, 2017; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018). Students who acquire early childhood reading skills should have a foundation for school success in later years (Vagi, Collins, & Clark, 2017).

Vagi et al. (2017) conducted a study to determine how student attendance is linked to early reading achievement focusing on the influence of literacy in a child's academic and personal development. The purpose of the study was to identify policies in the community, district, and school that influence the acquisition of reading skills, especially with poor and minority students. The study was conducted in Arizona with a diverse demographic of English language learners. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2016), 38% of Arizona fourth graders fell below basic reading levels in 2015; 51% of children were from low-income families.

Vagi et al. (2017) referenced Bronfenbrenner's (1978, 1979) ecological systems theory of human development—the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystems that influence a child's development over time. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that interactions with family, school, and neighborhood environments,

such as governing rules and policies for the child, could influence the child's development. Vagi et al. concluded that although poverty was a variable in their study, low third-grade reading scores were strongly related to chronic absenteeism. Vagi et al. suggested that agencies and organizations affiliated with children from birth to 8 years should partner to assist families of children who might be at risk for reading difficulties.

Children who are not proficient readers by the third grade can face challenges that cause unfavorable outcomes in school and in adulthood (Ferrier, 2015). The third grade is considered the turning point from learning to read to reading to learn. Ferrier (2015), writing for the Center for Public Education, explained that "third grade marks a pivot point in reading" (p. 1). Ferrier determined that early literacy skills might be enhanced with more involvement in literacy when the child is not in school, increased parent and child verbal communications, and more highly qualified literacy teachers for students in the early years.

Preschool attendance is essential for establishing reading readiness skills for kindergarten, especially for students who live in high-poverty neighborhoods (Erickson, 2018; Susman-Stillman et al., 2018). Students who do not enroll in pre-K programs may not be as successful in acquiring literacy skills as students who attend pre-K (Ferrier, 2015). Copple and Bredekamp (2009) explained that a preschool child aged 4 who lives in poverty could be at least 18 months behind students in the same age group who live in a more affluent household. Copple and Bredekamp pointed out that this gap in cognitive development could affect kindergarten readiness in reading and could continue in later years. The gap for reading achievement that begins at 4-years-old in students from low-

income families may be extended and reading performance will not improve in later years if they are chronically absent (Balu & Ehrlich, 2018).

A failure to read on grade level by the third grade could result in a greater likelihood of the student dropping out of school, unemployment, committing juvenile crimes, and a dependency on the welfare system (Kennedy, 2019; Workman, 2014). Workman (2014) determined that over 63% of students who did not graduate from high school on time were not reading proficiently in the third grade. Workman explained that children who are not reading competently by this grade are 4 times less likely to graduate from high school on time. Adults who are not able to read on grade level by the third grade might face poor health, are less likely to vote, and are unable to assist their children with acquiring reading readiness skills (Duchouquette, Loschert, & Barth, 2014; Kennedy, 2019). This is significant as parents are a part of the primary relationships that influence students' early literacy development (Bronfenbrenner, 1978). Kennedy (2019) described students who have not acquired literacy skills as "handicapped later in life" (p. 295). The inability to read leads to a lack of success in adulthood, which may cause underemployment, unemployment, and failure to own a home. Kennedy pointed out that adults who are illiterate might not have the ability to make informed decisions concerning their children's education.

Chronic absenteeism may hinder children from reading on grade level by the third grade and is especially disadvantageous for students from low-income families (Allensworth & Evans, 2016; Balfanz, 2016; Nauer, 2016). It is essential that students are exposed to an environment that will assist them in acquiring skills to be proficient readers

by the third grade. Balfanz (2016) and Ferrier (2015) suggested that school districts should focus more on daily attendance for each child as opposed to the ADA for the entire school, which can conceal chronic absenteeism among individual students. Students with low socioeconomic status are likely to show a gap in literacy skills, a predictor for reading difficulties in school (Gennetian et al., 2018; Snow et al., 1998). The home environment and the child's ability to read is part of the microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory where the child has a relationship with their family and school.

### **Educators' Views on Chronic Absenteeism**

Educators may have unfavorable opinions of parents' perspectives of chronic absenteeism (London et al., 2016). London et al. (2016) explained that many educators believe that chronic absenteeism persists because some parents do not understand the effects of inconsistent daily attendance. Some educators perceive that many parents do not keep track of their children's absences (Ad Council, 2015).

In a report by the Ad Council (2015) for the state of California, teachers noted that parents would usually respond to children's absences when rewards and incentives are given for good attendance. It was recommended that schools might improve attendance by informing parents that consistent daily attendance is likely to improve grades and test scores and by notifying parents daily with a text or a phone call when the student missed school. Although parents received letters, texts, and telephone calls, and students were given rewards, the teachers concluded that these methods of communication had little influence on how parents viewed absenteeism (Ad Council,

2015). Teachers suggested that chronic absenteeism is due to factors that hindered students' attendance and believed that parents did not understand that a pattern of missing school in the early years will influence consistent attendance in later years (Ad Council, 2015).

Gren-Landell, Allvin, Bradley, Andersson, and Andersson (2015) conducted an online survey with 158 regular and special education teachers in Grades 6-9 to investigate teachers' views on recurring issues that caused absenteeism in a Swedish school. The study used an open-ended questionnaire created for the study. Participants were solicited on Facebook and Twitter and from an issue on absenteeism in a paper for teachers. Of the 233 persons who logged in to view the website, 67.8% completed the questionnaire, 9.4% started but did not finish, and 22.8% viewed the questionnaire but did not complete any portions of the survey. The teachers were employed more than 5 years and suggested that both family and school problems influenced school attendance. Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) microsystem environment of the ecological systems theory applies in this instance, as relationships with the family and child and the school and child can influence interactions in a child's environment.

Teachers have determined that bullying in school is a factor that causes student absence (Bosworth, Garcia, Judkins, & Saliba, 2018). Bosworth et al. (2018) conducted an exploratory study to examine the responsibility of school leaders in effecting methods to improve school climate for students. The findings showed that methods to reduce bullying led to few changes. Gren-Landell et al. (2015) reported that family factors such as a permissive parenting style and alcohol abuse were the most prevalent reasons for

absenteeism. Peer pressure to miss school, domestic violence, worrying about being bullied, unemployment in the home, a low level of parental education, and difficulties with mastering skills were also factors linked to absenteeism (Gren-Landell et al., 2015). Gren-Landell et al. explained that teachers' views on the causes of school absenteeism are "underresearched" (p. 491). This study was conducted to understand teachers' attitudes regarding chronic absenteeism better and explore their suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance to fill this gap in the research.

### **Parent and Family Views on Chronic Absenteeism**

Research exists on the perspectives of parents of middle and high school students regarding chronic absenteeism (Powell, 2012; Swartz, 2015). Powell (2012) conducted a study on the root causes of chronic absenteeism identified as truancy for students in high school. Powell surveyed the parents of students in a suburban school in a northeastern region of the United States, which included diversity in race, ethnicity, and gender. Powell used a 4-point Likert scale to determine factors that influenced students' attendance at school, focusing on the parents' perspectives. Powell noted that parents' viewpoints on consistent daily attendance could be related to the beliefs and values in their own families and explained that their views on school attendance were frequently based on their childhood.

Swartz (2015) explained that parents' views of chronic absenteeism "may run in families" (p. 12). Swartz's study used grounded theory and took place in a suburban school district in the southeastern United States with middle school parents. Swartz noted that a pattern of chronic absenteeism was often found in the same family. Although

factors, such as a lack of transportation or parents' work schedules contributed to chronic absenteeism in families, Swartz explained that missing excessive days from school was generally overlooked by parents. Swartz concluded that parents' attitudes toward education could influence their children's education. While Powell (2012) and Swartz focused on parents' perspectives, their research concentrated on middle and high school age students and did not involve the perspectives of parents in Grades 1-3.

The Ad Council's (2015) California report was conducted to provide an understanding of parents' attitudes on truancy in middle and high schools and what should be done to prevent it. The study consisted of telephone interviews with 55 English and Spanish speaking school administrators, teachers, parents, school liaisons, advocates, and policy experts in Los Angeles, the East Bay, and the Fresno/San Joaquin area. Parental misconceptions included (a) attendance was not relevant in early grades, (b) any missed work could be easily made up, (c) only "consecutive absences" have an adverse effect (d) attendance was more about "compliance" than an "opportunity to learn," and (e) "all absences are excusable and justifiable, as long as parents allow; attending school 3 out of 5 days per week is acceptable" (Ad Council, p. 5). Many parents of truant students did not realize that instructional time was essential to academic success (Ad Council, 2015).

The research in California focused on truancy in middle and high schools in that state. The current study was conducted with 16 participants in a small elementary school in Mississippi; nearly all students are African American and English speakers. A large



majority of the students were born to single teenage mothers, live in public housing, with parents receiving public assistance as their livelihood.

The role of parental involvement in a child's education has been studied with different races and cultures; however, there is a need for more exploration of parents' attitudes on students' absenteeism (Gottfried, 2014; Smythe-Leistico & Page, 2018). Gottfried (2014) pointed out that the reasons for chronic absenteeism in the early years needs to be studied. Parents have the responsibility to ensure that their children have consistent daily attendance. Smythe-Leistico and Page (2018) designed and implemented a two-way text-based system that would allow communication between parents and the school. The intervention program was initiated to reduce chronic absences with kindergarten students. The parent-school program encouraged consistent daily attendance and provided support for parents who needed assistance with their child's attendance. Robinson, Lee, Dearing, and Rogers (2018) and a report by Attendance Works (2013) noted that reducing absences in early grades is linked to parents.

Robinson et al. (2018) conducted a randomized field experiment to reduce absenteeism in the early grades. The experiment involved 10 school districts with 42,856 students in Grades K-5 in a rural setting on the West Coast. The study was completed to evaluate the influence of parent-focused interventions with parents who did not value the importance of regular attendance and to determine whether a parent's belief regarding education was a factor that reduced absences. According to Robinson et al., parents from low-income districts who had negative experiences in school might not value the importance of regular attendance. Robinson et al. determined that parents would value

attendance more in middle and high school rather than in the early grades. For this reason, many parents do not value attendance for their children in Grades K-5 and might not encourage regular attendance during the early school years. The results showed that at the end of the school year, the interventions helped to decrease absenteeism by 15%.

The earlier report by Attendance Works (2013) is included in this literature review as the information is relevant to this current study. It was revealed that some parents would allow their children to miss school because they are unaware that chronic absenteeism, even in kindergarten, can put children behind academically. Parents can help increase consistent daily attendance by holding school systems and communities responsible for high teacher turnover, absenteeism, unsafe school conditions, a lack of high-quality teachers, and limited access to health resources (Attendance Works, 2013). Parents can become advocates for removing difficulties that cause chronic absenteeism when parents make consistent daily attendance a priority. They should also monitor chronic absences and request assistance from school or community agencies when obstacles prevent their children from having consistent daily attendance (Attendance Works, 2013). The attitudes of low-income parents of middle school children who had missed more than 10 days of school were broadened through interviews, and concluded that the school's main practice is to involve parents as early as preschool to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Parents' involvement with their children's schools can improve consistent daily attendance; however, parents and schools need to form a positive relationship in the United States and other countries (Attendance Works, 2013; Sadiku & Sylaj, 2019).

Sadiku and Sylaj's (2019) recent quantitative study was conducted in Kosovo in Southeast Europe to determine the influence of positive parent/teacher relationships on students to improve academic achievement and outcomes. Data were collected using a Likert scale questionnaire to assess the influence of communication and collaboration between parents and teachers. Variables in the study were parents' education, parents' support with teachers, parents' expectations, parent/teacher safety, and parent/teacher communication. It was found that parent/teacher relationships have a positive influence on the students' academic outcomes.

Parents' views on chronic absenteeism have been explored in locations other than the United States. A qualitative study to explore parents' views on the causes of chronic absenteeism was conducted with secondary students in Jamaica with a sample of 221 parents at nine schools (Jennings & Cook, 2015). The study involved three schools from rural areas (33% of the participants), and six schools in urban areas (67% of participants). Three Catholic schools, Kingston/St. Andrew, St. Catherine, and St. Mary were included in the sample as they were conveniently located.

Jennings and Cook (2015) described collecting data as a challenge as they were only given permission to interview participants in the school parking lot when students were being dropped off in the morning or picked up in the afternoon. The participants were between 20 and 60 years old; 89% were mothers and fathers. The other 11% of the participants were grandmothers, aunts, and uncles, who were guardians of the students. Jennings and Cook discussed the lack of data that focused on parents' views on chronic

absenteeism; therefore, there is a need to determine parents' views on absenteeism in other areas to influence more research on chronic absenteeism in the Caribbean.

The data in the current study were collected from interviews, were conducted in a less stressful setting than that of Jennings and Cook (2015), provided information regarding the reasons students failed to have consistent daily attendance, and the participants' suggestions for increasing and sustaining this behavior. Although this current study focused on chronic absenteeism, the location, student grade levels, method of data collection, and the number of participants were different from those in Jennings and Cook's research.

### **Strategies and Interventions That Reduce Chronic Absenteeism**

Strategies and interventions that reduce chronic absenteeism have been a major concern for schools in the past as chronic absenteeism is associated with low standardized test scores and may cause an increase in discipline problems and grade retention (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Weiler, Chesmore, Pryce, Haddock, & Rhodes, 2019). Kearney and Graczyk (2014), in a theoretical paper guided by a systematic search of the empirical literature, explained that truancy with youth in an urban middle school could lead to school dropout, juvenile legal problems, and a failure to graduate. Kearney and Graczyk suggested that interventions to improve attendance should begin in the early grades. Response to Intervention has been used for early identification and intervention, progress monitoring, and functional behavioral assessment for more than two decades (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014).

Kearney and Graczyk (2014) described a response to an intervention model as a method to identify students who are at risk for chronic absenteeism and to provide support to reduce obstacles that cause students to miss school. Kearney and Graczyk explained that this model is an intervention for students who are experiencing reading difficulties and students who have social and emotional problems. To effectively implement this type of model, they stated that collaboration with educators, parents, mental and medical professionals, and legal personnel, as well as the police and probation officers, is needed. The study outlined a response intervention model to identify and decrease school attendance; however, the researchers did not provide specific reasons for school absenteeism.

School attendance has been addressed by communities that determined that students who fail to attend school consistently are at risk for crime, high-poverty, unemployment, and health issues in adulthood (Childs & Grooms, 2018). Childs and Grooms (2018) conducted an exploratory qualitative study using interviews with a purposeful sample of 25 participants from January 2016 through May 2017. The interviewees consisted of principals, nonprofit staff, community members, district administrators, and parents in 13 elementary schools in Eero County in central Texas. The purpose of the study was to explore the strategies implemented in a large, urban, southern school district. Childs and Grooms wanted to determine the ways people and businesses collaborated to implement strategies for inconsistent school attendance.

Childs and Grooms (2018) indicated that school attendance might improve when parents, educators, local businesses, and government agencies regularly collaborated to

address the importance of consistent daily attendance. Childs and Grooms stated that strategies, such as (a) meeting regularly with school administrators, parents, and local community partners to discuss reasons for absenteeism; (b) using data that would identify students who might be at-risk for chronic absenteeism; and (c) implementing social, emotional, and using a Success Mentor Program will provide support for students who face challenges with consistent daily attendance. Childs and Grooms's approach of collaboration with stakeholders to reduce absenteeism was an effective strategy to address solutions and interventions for absenteeism. As with Kearney's and Graczyk's (2014) model, Childs and Grooms suggested that collaboration between schools and communities is needed to implement policies to reduce chronic absenteeism. The researchers' study differed from this current study for two reasons. They did not research reasons for chronic absenteeism and used a different sample, school site, and location from those in this study.

Chronic absenteeism decreases classroom learning and may be a predictor of poor grades, grade retention, or leaving school without graduating (Cook et al., 2017). Cook et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study on early truancy prevention, which revealed that home visits were an effective method to prevent truancy. The Early Truancy Prevention Program was the first to incorporate teacher home visits with 928 participating families and 44 teachers in 19 elementary schools as a method to prevent absenteeism as early as kindergarten. The pilot study, which implemented the Early Truancy Prevention Program, was tested in 2013-2014 in 20 first and second-grade classrooms in five high-poverty public elementary schools in a mid-sized district in the

South; 21 other classrooms were used as control groups. The schools were selected by the school administrators with the consent of the teachers and principals. Teachers were asked to sign a consent form and were compensated for the extra time needed to participate in the study.

Cook et al. (2017) implemented the new pilot program with a strategy to prevent primary school absenteeism and to improve literacy skills with first and second-grade students. Data were collected from each student's attendance record in both treatment and control classrooms, and through the teachers' questionnaires on the fluency of communication with parents and teachers. Cook et al. reported that the Early Truancy Prevention Program showed evidence that attendance and communication between parents and teachers in the primary schools had improved. According to Cook et al., reducing primary school absenteeism could improve achievement, reduce truancy, and increase graduation rates.

Cook et al. (2017) also recognized that absenteeism in the early grades predicts truancy in middle and high school; however, their study did not provide reasons for chronic absenteeism. This current study was conducted to explore the perspectives regarding reasons for absenteeism as well as the suggestions from the participants for increasing and sustaining attendance. This study provides reasons why students in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi are chronically absent. These results may help policymakers implement strategies in the early grades to decrease truancy in future years.

A school district in New Britain, Connecticut, implemented a study to determine whether there was a chronic absentee problem in each grade, although not in the form of ADA for the entire school (Chang et al., 2016). According to Chang et al. (2016), the focus on ADA fails to monitor the individual student's record of attendance, causing chronic absenteeism to be overlooked in the early grades. They explained that chronic absenteeism, as early as preschool, can predict poor reading skills, grade retention, and a pattern of absences in the later grades, which is more prevalent in high-poverty areas. The urban New Britain school system in the study had approximately 10,000 students who were at risk for academic failure: 30% of kindergarteners and 24% of first graders had missed 10% or 18 days of school and were chronically absent. There was an effort to decrease chronic absenteeism from 20% to 13% in Grades K-8 in the 2012-2013 school year. Reading scores increased from 43% in January 2013 to 52% in May 2013.

Chang et al. (2016) reported that the following strategies were implemented by the school district to reduce chronic absenteeism:

- Professional development for principals and school staff to interpret attendance data.
- Actionable data to provide information to school leaders on the percentage of students who are chronically absent or have poor attendance.
- School attendance teams to monitor data and to ensure that interventions and supports are in place.
- Home visits to families whose kindergarteners and preschoolers are chronically absent.



- Parent engagement and communication by providing information on the importance of attendance.
- Community partnership with the Department of Children and Families and the local Boys and Girls Club for community support. (p. 24)

A research brief (Communities in Schools, 2014) highlighted the importance of students spending the required 175 to 180 days a year in school for 13 years (K-12) to help them be successful. The brief noted that a pattern of consistent daily attendance begins in kindergarten. Chronic absenteeism has negative educational outcomes when students miss time from school, regardless of the cause. Communities in Schools (2014) indicated that there is a need to address strategies to help students to improve attendance, including (a) addressing individual student needs, (b) identifying sources of absenteeism, (c) developing individual attendance plans or contracts, (d) organizing student support groups, (e) discovering student interests and connecting them to available resources, (f) being culturally aware, (g) conducting visits to the student's home, and (f) referring students to community resources to address the cause of absenteeism or problem (p. 4).

According to a report by Attendance Works (2014), various states have used strategies to tackle the problem of chronic absenteeism. For example, teachers at an elementary school in Providence, Rhode Island, created an early care and breakfast program that allowed parents who worked nights to bring their children to school before the regular start time. The state superintendent in California held a conference with businesses and agencies to encourage collaboration to assist schools with chronic absenteeism. In 2013, Maryland---the state that has monitored chronic absenteeism

longer than other---lawmakers mandated that school districts track students who were missing an excessive number of school days and provide interventions to increase consistent attendance. Subsequently, Massachusetts, Virginia, Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and New Jersey have implemented plans to monitor attendance and provide strategies and interventions for students who might become school dropouts (Attendance Works, 2014). In addition, the Every Student Succeeds Act was written to reduce absences through community and school collaboration to assist students in achieving consistent daily attendance (Balu & Ehrlich, 2018).

Truancy is a national problem that has prompted researchers to examine interventions to decrease school dropout rates (Rhodes, Thomas, & Liles, 2018; Weiler et al., 2019). Previous intervention methods were used to discourage dropout in secondary schools outside of the United States (Cabus & De Witte, 2014). Cabus and De Witte (2014) studied an Active School Attendance Intervention initiative implemented in Dutch secondary schools. The pilot program was put in place to reduce school dropout in a collaborative effort with teachers, compulsory education officers, social workers, and professional mentors. Cabus and De Witte explained that the process included talking to the truants, home visits by social workers to conference with students and the parents, and a meeting with all stakeholders to discuss best practices for each student who might be at-risk for truancy. The researchers found that truancy was reduced by 0.54% during the 2009-2010 school year, which was lower than the 1.4% truancy rate in the 2008-2009 school year when the program was implemented (Cabus & De Witte, 2014). Cabus and De Witte determined that future success in solving truancy would depend on a

collaborative effort with students, parents, teachers, compulsory education officers, social workers, and professional mentors.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Chronic absenteeism was addressed in the United States in Massachusetts as far back as 1852 (Gleich-Bope, 2014). Rogers (2014) reported that as early as 1635, students in the Boston Latin School were truant; however, the problems of chronic absenteeism and truancy continue. Chronic absenteeism, which could start as early as kindergarten, can lead to a student's failure to read on grade level by the third grade, grade retention, truancy, school dropout, and juvenile crime (Allensworth & Evans, 2016; Balfanz, 2016; Chang et al., 2016). Although chronic absenteeism was determined to cause unfavorable outcomes for students, there is a gap in the research for students in the early years as to the reasons why nearly 8 million students are missing 18 days or 10% of school a year in the United States (Attendance Works, 2018a; Balfanz, 2016).

This literature review contains a discussion of peer-reviewed articles on truancy, has and it was concluded that chronic absenteeism can begin in the early years (Mallett, 2015; Rocque et al., 2017; Zalaznick, 2015). The literature review also included an evaluation of studies on the chronic absenteeism in Mississippi, where a high rate in this area is linked to students' failure to read on grade level by the third grade (MDE, 2014, 2018; Skinner, 2015). Educators' attitudes and parents' views on chronic absenteeism were also discussed in this chapter.

The current basic qualitative study is meaningful in that it fills a gap in the literature and extends knowledge regarding the reasons millions of students continue to

be chronically absent in the United States. This research on chronic absenteeism identifies the causes of this behavior and provides suggestions from the participants regarding strategies to increase and sustain attendance in schools that experience this problem. No previous study was conducted on the perspectives regarding chronic absenteeism and suggestions for improvement by educators and parents of students in Grades 1-3 as well as support staff in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi that has failed to have consistent daily attendance.

In Chapter 3, the research method is described and includes the research design and its rationale as well as a description of my role as the researcher. I address the methodology of participant selection, instrumentation, and the recruitment of participants, their participation, and data collection along with the data analysis plan. Finally, I discuss issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The research problem in this study was the chronic absenteeism rate of students in Grades 1–3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of six parents, six educators, and four school support staff (i.e., a secretary, data processor, social worker, and DOPS) regarding the causes of chronic absenteeism and their recommendations to increase and sustain students' attendance at this school. This research was necessary to determine the causes of chronic student absenteeism and provide suggestions to increase and sustain attendance in schools where this occurs.

In this chapter, I present the RQs, the central concept of the study, and the research tradition. The role of the researcher is discussed. The methodology section includes the criterion/criteria for participant selection, instrumentation, and the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. The data analysis plan is also described in step-by-step detail. The appropriate strategies to determine credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to establish trustworthiness are explained. I also provide the ethical procedures required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University before data collection began.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The following RQs guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of parents, educators, and school support staff of the causes of chronic absenteeism in Grades 1–3 at a high-poverty, low-

performing school as explored through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of parents, educators, and school support staff regarding recommendations to increase and sustain students' attendance in Grades 1–3?

The phenomenon that grounded this study was chronic absenteeism. I used the works of Balfanz and Byrnes (2012, 2018) and Balfanz (2016) on chronic absenteeism to provide a clear definition of this phenomenon. The authors in both studies explained that chronic absenteeism is missing 18 days or 10% of school in a year. I chose a basic qualitative research design for this study, which involved collecting data from interviews from a small sample size (see Merriam, 1998). In this study, I explored the perspectives of 16 participants regarding reasons students in Grades 1–3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi failed to have consistent daily attendance as well as gathered the participants' suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance. According to Merriam (2009), a basic qualitative research approach helps to uncover the views and perspectives of participants.

A basic qualitative research approach was more appropriate for this study than ethnography, which investigates the experiences and perspectives of people in different cultures (see Creswell, 2012). Phenomenological research was not appropriate either because this research method is more suitable for “studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 26). I did not consider a case study to be an effective research design for this study because it involves a comprehensive

examination of a single subject, a particular event, or an individual setting using multiple sources of data (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012).

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the sole researcher was to conduct the study and collect, analyze, and evaluate the data. Throughout this process, I served as scheduler and interviewer. I did not have any personal or professional relationships with any of the participants, was not employed at the school where the study was conducted, and was not a supervisor of any of the participants. This study was not conducted in my own work environment.

I acknowledged personal bias in that I believe parents are unaware of the negative outcomes linked to inconsistent daily attendance and how this affects their children's academic achievement. Moustakas (1994) suggested that personal bias should be addressed before the research begins. I managed my bias by using only the prewritten, open-ended, nonleading interview questions I drafted. However, if I felt an impulse to interject my opinions during the interviews, I wrote my thoughts on the interview protocol document instead of expressing these aloud.

Ortlipp (2008) explained that thoughts, feelings, and opinions about a study should be recorded prior to interviews to make sure that biases do not affect data collection or the data analysis process; therefore, I recorded my thoughts on the interview protocol document prior to, during, and after each interview to reduce bias in data collection and analysis. As a certified teacher, I am legally responsible for reporting any issues of negligence or abuse of a student. My goal was to maintain the fidelity of the interview process and carefully manage my role as researcher by listening to and

gathering participants' responses, experiences, and perspectives. No other ethical issues needed to be addressed that might have caused a conflict of interest or power differential. Each participant received a \$10.00 cash gift as a thank you for participation in the study.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

It is important to note that the elementary school selected for my study reported high chronic absenteeism for several years and faces a range of unfavorable factors representative of elementary schools across the state. The chronic absence levels across the 948 schools in Mississippi's 152 districts are distributed in five levels. The elementary school selected for this study had an absentee rate for the 2015–2016 school year that was significantly higher than the 14.2 % average for the state (MDE, 2018). The school in this study was identified as a high-poverty, low-performing school for over a decade, with students falling below the state's passing rate for the English Language Exam. In addition, a significant number of third-grade students at this elementary school failed to pass the 3rd Grade Reading Summative Assessment. The school was ranked near the bottom of the 404 elementary schools in the state of Mississippi.

The demographics of students of Grades 1–3 at the school are almost entirely African American and live in 7 of the 8 public housing apartments in the area. All are English speaking. The majority of students in this elementary school face hunger and food insecurity. Talk Poverty's (2016) report on Mississippi concluded that 20.8% of households in the state during 2014–2015 had inadequate food. Students at this school participate in the National School Lunch Program, which allows 100% of students to



receive a free breakfast and lunch based on income. Seventy-five percent of these low-income families rely on public assistance for their livelihood. As of 2012, Mississippi had one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the United States (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2015). Thirty-eight out of 1,000 births are from mothers aged 15 to 19 years old (Talk Poverty, 2016).

I purposefully selected the 16 participants for this study. Creswell (2012) explained that purposeful sampling includes examining the research site and selecting participants who are able to provide information on the central concept. The central concept for this study was chronic absenteeism. The purposeful sample of six parents and six educators of students in Grades 1-3, a secretary, a data processor, a social worker, and the DOPS were important because these participants were viewed as having key information related to the purpose of this research. These participants had direct contact with students in this school or had knowledge of the issue of chronic absenteeism in the school and district.

The perspectives of the secretary and data processor were particularly important in this study. Parents often communicated to the secretary or data processor in-person, through written correspondences, or telephone calls regarding why students were absent. The social worker and DOPS worked with students, families, and schools in this district to improve academic and behavioral achievements and to implement programs for dropout prevention. By working with students in elementary schools in this district, the social worker and DOPS were able to provide their perspectives regarding the reasons students had inconsistent daily attendance.

The criteria for participation of the six educators included selecting teachers of Grades 1–3 who also had 4 or more years of teaching experience within the district. The criterion for the secretary, data processor, social worker, and DOPS was to have 4 or more years with the district where the research was conducted. The only criterion for parents was to have a child in either first, second, or third grade. I did not give preference to any ethnicity, gender, race, or age for the parents, educators, secretary, data processor, social worker, or DOPS.

The district's requirement for conducting research was, first, to notify and seek permission from the superintendent. The superintendent contacted the principal at the research site to let them know I wished to conduct research at the elementary school. After receiving Walden University's IRB approval (No. 03-29-19-00031802) to conduct this study, I e-mailed the superintendent, listing the topic of the study, its purpose, and the proposed 16 participants. To protect the confidentiality of the secretary, data processor, social worker, and DOPS, these participants were referred to as four school support staff in the e-mails to the superintendent and the principal.

The e-mail to the superintendent was followed by a telephone call to request permission to conduct research at the school. I allotted 1 to 2 weeks for a response to gain permission to conduct the study. After I received approval from the superintendent, I e-mailed the DOPS to ask her to participate. The superintendent was not told that the DOPS was recruited to protect confidentiality. I allowed 1 to 2 weeks for a response from the DOPS.

After the superintendent notified the principal of permission to research, I e-mailed the principal to schedule a meeting and request permission to conduct the research. The e-mail contained a description of the topic and purpose of the study and included the number of participants to be recruited. The superintendent and the principal made the decisions to allow me to conduct the study separately. I allotted 1 to 2 weeks for the principal to schedule a meeting, in which I discussed my research and reviewed the topic and purpose of the study. I explained that I needed to recruit six parents and six educators of students in Grades 1–3 as well as four school support staff as participants for the study. I also explained to the principal that the six educators and four school support staff should have 4 or more years of service with the district, and there was not a preference regarding ethnicity, gender, race, or age for any of the 16 participants in my study. The principal was informed that the only criterion for parents was to have a child in either first, second, or third grade. The four school support staff were not identified as the secretary, data processor, social worker, and DOPS to protect their identities.

When I was given permission from the principal to recruit participants, the secretary was appointed as the gatekeeper. I provided flyers to the secretary to recruit the six parents and six educators. The secretary posted flyers around the school and placed them in the educators' mailboxes for the parents and educators of students in Grades 1–3. Students were given flyers by their classroom teachers in sealed envelopes labeled PARENT to take home. I placed my name and contact information on the outside of the envelope to indicate the enclosed information was not from the school.

I allowed 7 days to receive responses from the six parents and six educators. Because I failed to acquire the needed parent participants for the study within the allotted time, more flyers were given to the secretary to place in the educators' mailboxes, and 7 days were added to the response time. Flyers were again given to students by classroom teachers and sent home in the same manner as before. These flyers were identical to the originals.

After the flyers were distributed, I e-mailed the secretary, assistant principal, social worker, and DOPS to request their participation in the study. I allotted 1 to 2 weeks for responses from the four school support staff. The assistant principal declined to participate in the study; therefore, I e-mailed the data processor from another elementary school in the district with similar demographics. Walden's IRB agreed that if anyone from the four school support staff failed to participate or resigned from the study, I could substitute other school support staff who had knowledge of students' absences. As the entire district suffers from high absenteeism rates, this process could have been repeated if needed. The e-mails included the topic and the purpose of the study as well as the inclusion criteria that the participants should have 4 or more years of service with the district to be eligible to interview for the study.

Merriam (2009) explained that a basic qualitative research study could be conducted with a small sample size. Creswell (2012) suggested that a smaller participant group in qualitative research will allow the researcher to decrease the time collecting and analyzing data. This study had 16 participants, which allowed for the collection of more in-depth information regarding the most common causes of chronic absenteeism at the

school based on Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory as well as the participants' suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance.

The flyers for the parents and educators gave information on the topic, the purpose of the study, and explained that parents and educators of students in Grades 1-3 were needed as participants for this basic qualitative research. My telephone number and e-mail address were listed on the flyers, which allowed participants to contact me and volunteer for the study. Stated in the flyer, participants were notified they would receive a \$10.00 cash thank you gift for participation in the study. After the six parents and six educators responded to flyers and agreed to participate in the study, I verbally verified with the participants by telephone or e-mail that they met the criterion/criteria for participation. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form before interviews were conducted. The educators and parents were notified of their right to drop out of the study at any time.

The privacy of the participants was fundamental. The superintendent and principal did not receive a list of participants interviewed for the study to protect their confidentiality. All participants' names or other identifying information were kept confidential. The titles of the four school support staff were not listed on the interview protocol document or informed consent forms. To identify parents, educators, and school support staff separately, each participant was assigned alphanumeric codes to protect his/her identity. The six parents (P) were identified as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6. The six educators (E) were identified as E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, and E6. The four school support staff

(S) were assigned S1, S2, S3, and S4. The single letter for each participant was to shorten the codes for participants.

### **Instrumentation**

The data collection instrument for this basic qualitative research approach was the interview protocol document (Appendix A), which listed the topic of the study and the time, date, and place of the interview. It also provided my name as the interviewer, the name of the interviewee, participant specification (parent, educator, and district or school title), and the interview questions. The semistructured, open-ended interview questions and probes were prewritten and drafted based on the RQs and guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) microsystem and mesosystem of the ecological systems theory.

Open-ended questions allowed the participants to express their thoughts with full and meaningful answers, as opposed to closed-ended questions that are preset by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). The open-ended interview questions were drafted specifically for this study and structured to keep the participants focused and to allow for flexibility in their responses. This format prompted the participants to discuss and respond to questions more fully and offer perspectives regarding the reasons students in Grades 1-3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi failed to have consistent daily attendance and provide suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance.

The interview questions were designed to elicit experiential and thoughtful responses so that the participants could consider a range of possibilities, rather than

yes/no or brief responses. The questions were reviewed by two professors at a local college in Mississippi to make sure they were adequate, clear, and would provide answers to the RQs. Additional interview questions were designed to seek the participants' suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance as all 16 participants were expected to have experience and information regarding absenteeism.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The recruitment of participants did not begin until the IRB at Walden University had given approval to start the research. The method of recruiting participants for this basic qualitative research study began by contacting the superintendent of the district in which the high-poverty, low-performing school identified for this study was located. The superintendent was given the topic, purpose of the study, and the number and description of the participants needed for the study via e-mail. A follow-up telephone call was made to the superintendent to discuss my research, who was needed to grant permission to conduct the study at the research site. Although the DOPS is a district employee, the superintendent was not told whether the DOPS had participated in the study to protect their confidentiality.

The superintendent contacted the principal to discuss the research and to inform her that I would contact her about research at the elementary school. After the superintendent contacted the principal, I e-mailed the principal to schedule a meeting and request permission to conduct research. At the meeting, I explained the topic and purpose of the study. I informed the principal that I needed to recruit six parents and six educators of students in Grades 1-3 and four school support staff as participants for the study. I

clarified that the six educators and four school support staff should have 4 or more years of service with the district, and that there was no preference regarding ethnicity, gender, race, or age for any of the 16 participants in my study.

The school principal appointed the secretary as the gatekeeper, who provided access to the elementary school and delivered flyers to recruit the six parents and six educators. The superintendent, principal, and all potential participants were informed that their personal information and the location of the study would be confidential.

The six parents and six educators were recruited by posting flyers at the study school and sending flyers home with students in Grades 1-3 in sealed envelopes and labeled PARENT. My name and contact information were placed on the outside of the envelope to indicate further that the enclosed information was not from the school. Flyers to recruit educators were placed in educators' mailboxes by the secretary. The flyers for parents and educators provided information on the topic and the purpose of the study and explained that parents and educators of students in Grades 1-3 were needed to be participants in the study. My e-mail address and telephone number were listed on the flyer to allow potential participants to contact me to volunteer for the study. The flyers stated that participants would receive a \$10.00 cash thank you gift for participation.

Following permission from the superintendent to conduct the research, I e-mailed the four school support staff to recruit their participation in the study. The superintendent was not given the identities of the four school support staff to protect their confidentiality. The e-mails provided the topic and the purpose of the study. The participants were assigned alphanumeric codes to protect their identities. The six parents



(P) were assigned P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6. The six educators (E) were E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, and E6. The four school support staff (S) were S1, S2, S3, and S4.

After the 16 participants had been selected, I arranged to contact each by telephone to explain that participation was voluntary, that the interviews would be recorded, and that they could choose to leave the study at any point. The participants were told that interviews are expected to last approximately 60 minutes, and a scheduled time and place for the interviews were arranged during this initial call. A copy of the informed consent form was provided to parents, educators, and school support staff by e-mail so they would have it in their possession prior to meeting for the interview.

### **Data Collection**

The participants were asked to sign the informed consent form before the interviews were conducted. When the informed consent forms for parents and educators were reviewed, signed, and returned to me in person, I was ready to proceed with the interview process. I asked each participant if they had any questions (no one did), and they were again told that they might exit the study at any time.

The interviews were one-on-one. Questions were asked one-at-a-time and follow-up, probing questions were used as needed to draw out more complete responses from the participants. I interviewed parents and educators during a mutually agreed upon time and place away from the research site. The times and places of the interviews were not shared with the principal, superintendent, or other participants to protect confidentiality.

The secretary, data processor, social worker, and DOPS were interviewed at a place and time that were convenient. All interviews were private and confidential. I

interviewed three participants each week and allotted 3-months for verifying criterion/criteria for participants, scheduling a time and place for interviews, and conducting and completing the 16 interviews. The 3 months were scheduled to accommodate missed or rescheduled appointments.

The data were recorded on an interview protocol document and by using a digital recorder. The recorder was checked prior to interviews to make sure it was working properly and was sufficient to pick up the voices of the participants and the interviewer. Participants were not asked to return for a follow-up session, and I did not need to phone or e-mail them to clarify any responses. Post-interview, I provided a summary of findings to all participants via e-mail. Member checking was performed when the 16 participants checked the summary of findings for the accuracy of their data. All participants e-mailed that they agreed with the accuracy of their data and the summary of findings. All participants received a \$10.00 cash thank you gift for participation in the study.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Thematic analysis was used to review themes uncovered during the interviews. The data were connected to the RQs by examining the responses of parents, educators, and the four school support staffs' perspectives regarding the causes of chronic absenteeism for students in Grades 1-3 in a high-poverty, low-performing school based on Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory. Following the interviews, the data were analyzed through an inductive process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lodico et al., 2010). This inductive process involved conducting interviews to explore participants' perspectives, putting together patterns of similarities and phrases from the participants'

responses, coding the data, forming themes, and analyzing data to answer the RQs.

Lodico et al. (2010) described the inductive process as forming an interpretation or meaning of what is being researched only after it has begun.

I was the only person to examine and analyze the data. I did not use a software program for transcription during the analysis. I analyzed the transcripts by looking for recurring words, concepts, or patterns. Once identified, the patterns were labeled and color coded. The data collected from participants provided reasons for chronic absenteeism in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi, and the participants offered suggestions for increasing and sustaining attendance.

The procedure for coding involved, first, using a priori codes to search for recurring patterns of words, concepts, or phrases that fit within the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) five ecological systems. Data from interviews involved the area where the child is the center of their environment and interacts with family, school, and teachers. This was coded under the microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system. The microsystem involves the child's family and family attitudes and beliefs (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993). Events such as the child being away from school due to a death in the family or a vacation scheduled during school were coded under the mesosystem as these concern interactions of the microsystems. A priori coding of data under Bronfenbrenner's exosystem included occurrences that did not directly involve the child. Interactions such as a parent's lack of employment that could cause the child to live in a shelter or become homeless may have an influence on the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1993).

The codes that emerged from interview data that involved childrearing patterns and values or beliefs of the family culture were a part of the Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) macrosystem. Finally, events such as a death of a family member, divorce, substance abuse, or the child being placed in a foster home were coded under Bronfenbrenner's exosystem. After a priori coding was completed, I used open coding to complete the step-by-step process of coding and analyzing the a priori codes and interview data from 16 participants.

Moustakas (1994) stated that the open coding process is used to make sense of transcribed data. Open coding involved the first level of coding in search of concepts in repeated words or phrases that formed the basis of the analysis. Creswell (2012) described the inductive process of coding data by reading the data, determining what is being discussed, making an initial assessment, "labeling the data and assigning 30-40 codes, rereading the data, reducing codes to 20, forming categories, then build 5-7 themes" (p. 244). Creswell explained that a few themes developed in qualitative research could provide more in-depth information than a larger amount when analyzing data. Lodico et al. (2010) described these steps for analyzing qualitative data:

- Prepare and organize the data;
- Review and explore the data;
- Code data into categories;
- Construct thick descriptions of peoples, places, and activities;
- Build themes and test hypotheses; and
- Report and interpret data. (p. 180)

There were no discrepant cases in the data that provided opposing perspectives regarding reasons chronic absenteeism was a problem. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that discrepant cases could strengthen a study, and these would have been included here.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was established in this basic qualitative research through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Credibility was established by member checking, which allowed participants an opportunity to check for accuracy in their data. Harper and Cole (2012) explained that allowing the participants the opportunity to check the data in qualitative research helps improve accuracy, credibility, and validity of the interview responses. A typed summary of the study findings was e-mailed to the participants to read and check. All participants e-mailed that they agreed with the accuracy of the summary of findings.

Lodico et al. (2010) suggested that transferability can be determined by the reader through a detailed account of the study from the researcher. Thick, rich descriptions were provided to the reader in this study. Transferability of the results depends on whether the reader determines if the results can be transferred to a similar area or situation (Anney, 2014) and if the parameters of the study fit the area of study or can be applied in similar conditions. Transferability could depend on variation in participant selection while collecting data. For example, the assistant principal was recruited to participate in this study; however, she e-mailed her regret that she would not be able to take part. After the assistant principal declined the invitation, I recruited the data processor from another elementary school with similar demographics in the district by e-mail.

Dependability was established by providing thick, rich descriptions of the findings, participants, and setting so other researchers can follow the step-by-step procedures to duplicate the study (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010) including the decisions regarding the participants, the research site, when and how the data were collected, and how the data were analyzed. Confirmability for the study was established by reflexivity. Creswell (2012) explained that reflexivity allows the researcher to reveal and write out their biases and beliefs.

As the sole researcher in this study, the interview questions I drafted were reviewed by two professors at a local college to make sure they were adequate to answer the RQs and were clear. I wrote out my thoughts in the margins of the interview protocol document before, during, and after the interview versus expressing them aloud when interviewing the participants. Potential bias could have affected the research process and the findings in my study (Creswell, 2012) if it had not been addressed prior to collecting the data. I did not interject my personal feelings, thoughts, or biases into the data analysis. I referred to my prewritten thoughts, feelings, and biases, as well as other thoughts I wrote out during the interview.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The ethical treatment of participants for this study began by first obtaining approval from Walden's University Research Review member. Next, I completed an IRB application and received approval before I conducted my research or contacted the superintendent to request permission to conduct research. I e-mailed the superintendent to explain my basic qualitative study and requested permission to conduct it at the school.

The superintendent contacted the principal, who granted permission to recruit participants. The principal appointed the secretary to act as the gatekeeper, who allowed access to the school and provided contact with the participants.

I recruited the six parents and six educators of students in Grades 1-3 with flyers posted at the school and sent home with students in sealed envelopes labeled PARENT. My name and contact information were on the outside of the envelope to indicate this information was not from the school. The flyers for educators were placed in their mailboxes. The secretary, data processor, social worker, and DOPS were recruited by e-mail. I did not recruit parents or educators of students in Grades 1-3 or the four support staff at the school where I am employed, nor did I have contact with parents or educators at the school before the study.

The 16 participants were purposefully selected and adequate to provide data to answer the RQs with in-depth information. Early withdrawal or refusal to participate in the study by any of the participants was a concern. The assistant principal declined to participate, which necessitated that I contact another support staff from a second elementary school in the district with similar demographics (with IRB approval) to take part in this study.

The flyer for recruiting, the participant consent form, interview protocol, and the e-mail to request permission from the superintendent to conduct research were approved by the University Research Review member. The interview questions and probes are listed on the interview protocol document (Appendix A) and were also approved prior to the start of research. The IRB requires safeguards to protect the rights of participants

from issues that might cause risk or harm. As required by Walden University, the National Institutes of Health training was completed on August 16, 2015, Certification Number 1814009. The certification is valid for 5 years (August 15, 2020). This training was required before I was approved to collect data for my study.

A copy of the informed consent form was given to each participant prior to their interview to read, sign, and return to me. Each participant was informed of their right to withdraw at any time during the process (Lodico et al., 2010) and that they would not be pressed to answer any question during the interview. Interviews were at a time and place mutually agreeable. As an incentive to participate in my study, I provided a \$10.00 cash thank you gift to each participant.

I adhered to the Walden University's code of ethics set forth by the IRB. The participants' identities, responses, and location of the research site were kept confidential. I did not share or use participants' answers for my personal gain. Walden University code of ethics requires that the data be stored in two separate places for 5 years beyond completion of the study. All paper data such as signed consent forms, interview protocol documents, as well as digitally taped responses collected from each participant were locked in my personal filing cabinet at my home and stored on my personal computer with password access. I am the only person with a key to the cabinet and password to retrieve data from my personal computer. At the end of 5 years, all will be destroyed. The data stored on my personal computer will be purged.



### **Summary**

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to explore the perspectives of six parents, six educators, and four school support staff regarding the causes of chronic absenteeism and their recommendations to increase and sustain students' attendance in Grades 1-3 in a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi. The method of collecting data for this study was one-on-one interviews using open-ended, semistructured questions.

Approval was obtained from Walden University's IRB, the district, and the school where the research took place before beginning the recruitment process. Ethical procedures were used to recruit participants and collect and analyze data. Thematic analysis using a priori and open coding strategies were employed in data analysis. A priori codes were based on Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) five ecological systems. Open coding was applied to the a priori codes and raw data. Themes that emerged from the data were categorized and correlated with each RQ.

Ethical considerations were applied to all participants outlined by Walden University's IRB. Participants were informed that their responses were confidential. Data will be secured for 5 years and then destroyed in agreement with Walden University's ethical policies.

In Chapter 4, the purpose of the study and RQs are reviewed. I discuss the setting for the research, data collection procedures, and data analysis process. I present the results of the study and evidence of their trustworthiness.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative research was to explore the perspectives of six parents, six educators, and four school support staff regarding the causes of chronic absenteeism of students in Grades 1-3 in a high-poverty, low-performing school in Mississippi and obtain their recommendations to increase and sustain students' attendance. The RQs for this basic qualitative study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of parents, educators, and school support staff of the causes of chronic absenteeism in Grades 1-3 at a high-poverty, low-performing school as explored through ecological systems theory?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of parents, educators, and school support staff regarding recommendations to increase and sustain students' attendance in Grades 1-3?

### Setting

The setting for this study was a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school in Mississippi facing conditions that may have influenced the participants or their experiences at the time of this study. The district has a high teacher turnover and absenteeism rate as well as teacher shortages; therefore, schools are staffed with novice teachers and long-term substitutes. The participants in this study were from two elementary schools with approximately 500 students each, 100% of whom are African American. Many of the students live in public housing apartments with parents who depend on public assistance for their livelihood. A majority of the students in Grades 1-3 were born to teenage, single mothers. The district social worker pointed out that

approximately 75% of students are from one-parent families and 100% of students receive free school lunches. All students are English speaking.

### **Participants' Demographics**

The six educators in this study were employed from 4 to 43 years by the school district. Four of the educators taught Grade 1, and two taught Grade 3. Four of the educators had earned master's degrees; five were female and one was male. The four school support staff participants had between 8 to 16 years of experience with the district. Two had master's degrees. Three of the school support staff were female and one was male (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Demographic Information for the Six Educator and Four School Support Staff**Participants*

Title	Years in district	Grades taught	Master's degree	Gender
E1	10	First	Yes	Female
E2	12	First	Yes	Female
E3	7	First	No	Female
E4	43	Third	Yes	Female
E5	14	Third	Yes	Female
E6	4	First	No	Male
S1	8		No	Female
S2	8		No	Male
S3	16		Yes	Female
S4	14		Yes	Female

Five of the parents were female and one was male. Three of the female parents were single and two were married. The male parent was married. The parents had students in first, second, and third grades. One female parent had students in both first and third grades. Three parents had graduated from high school and three had dropped out of school before graduation (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Demographic Information for the Six Parent Participants*

Title	Marital status	Student in grade(s)	High school graduate	Gender
P1	Married	First	Yes	Female
P2	Single	First and third	No	Female
P3	Married	Second	Yes	Female
P4	Married	Second	Yes	Male
P5	Single	First	No	Female
P6	Single	First	No	Female

**Data Collection**

I collected data from 16 participants through one-on-one interviews. None of the second-grade educators at the school volunteered to participate. I conducted the interviews with the secretary, data processor, social worker, and one of the educators in a private office at the school without interruptions; this location was mutually requested by the participants. I interviewed the other participants in the library, a coffee shop, and in a classroom at a church, which were private spaces and mutually agreed upon by participants. All participants were interviewed one time.

I scheduled the interviews three per week for 5 weeks. The last of the 16 interviews was scheduled for the sixth week. I had to reschedule three of the parent interviews: One parent had an emergency and had to reschedule 2 weeks later, another did not have childcare and had to reschedule for the next week, while the third parent had

to reschedule due to work obligations. I conducted the 16 interviews in 60-minute sessions.

I collected and recorded data on an interview protocol document (see Appendix A) and used a digital audio recorder to record the interview questions and responses. I transcribed all recordings on the same day as the interview. The typed transcriptions with the date and place of the interview and the participants' alphanumeric codes (for identification) were stored on my personal computer with password access.

There was one variation in data collection from the original plan. I initially recruited the assistant principal to participate in the study; however, she e-mailed her regrets that she would not be able to participate. Walden's IRB had previously given approval to replace anyone from the school support staff who failed to participate or resigned from the study with another of the school's support staff who had knowledge of student absences. I recruited the data processor from another elementary school with similar district demographics by e-mail after the assistant principal declined to participate in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed the data in this basic qualitative study using an inductive process (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lodico et al., 2010). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explained that the inductive process extends from the "bottom up" when data are being analyzed (p. 6). The procedures for coding in this study involved using a priori codes first to search for recurring patterns of words, concepts, or phrases that fit within the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) five ecological systems. After a priori coding was

completed, I used open coding in a step-by-step process of coding and analyzing the a priori codes and interview data from the 16 participants. During the analysis process, I listened to the digital audio recordings and transcribed the participant responses verbatim after each interview.

I was the only person who examined the data. I reread the data to look for patterns of words and phrases before I assigned a priori codes. When a priori coding, I reviewed the transcribed data and used different colors to flag words and phrases based on Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) five ecological systems: microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, and chronosystem. The analysis of the 16 participants' words and phrases fit under microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem. Color coding was as follows: (a) microsystem was coded green, (b) mesosystem was coded orange, and (c) exosystem was coded blue. There were no transcript excerpts related to the macrosystem or chronosystem. Transcript excerpts are listed separately for parents, educators, and the four school support staff (see Appendix B).

After a priori coding was completed, I conducted open coding. Open coding is a process used to search for patterns of words and concepts and repeated words or phrases that form the basis of the analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Open coding was used to make sense of the transcribed data (see Moustakas, 1994). During open coding, I assigned 35 open codes and copied them onto a clean document. Next, I reread the data and looked for matching patterns of words and concepts. Finally, the 35 open codes were reduced to 20, with 10 categories emerging from the data (see Appendix C). The 10 categories

regarding the causes of chronic absenteeism at home and at school, which addressed

RQ1, were:

- lack of transportation,
- sickness,
- lack of means,
- poor motivation and an indifferent attitude,
- unsafe home environment,
- poor parental assistance,
- bullying,
- poor academic skills,
- poor parent/teacher relationship, and
- homelessness/eviction.

From these 10 categories, two themes emerged:

- Theme 1: Causes of chronic absenteeism for students at home and
- Theme 2: Causes of chronic absenteeism for students at school.

I analyzed the data to determine a priori codes for RQ2 based on

Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory. The participants' responses fit the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem of Bronfenbrenner's theory (see Appendix D). No data applied to the macrosystem or chronosystem. I repeated the same procedure for open coding done for RQ1. While examining the participants' interview excerpts, I assigned 21 open codes and copied them onto a clean document. Next, I reread the data and looked for matching patterns of words and concepts. The 21 open codes were



reduced to 15. The following seven categories emerged from the open codes (see Appendix E):

- improve parental guidance,
- building positive relationships (i.e., teacher-student and parent-teacher),
- educating parents and teachers about bullying,
- educating teachers on positive reinforcement,
- educating parents and teachers about community resources,
- providing information about alternate transportation, and
- educating parents and teachers about attendance policies.

From these seven categories, one theme emerged: Theme 3: Educating parents and teachers.

In increase and sustain students' attendance, the participants' recommended educating parents and teachers on attendance policies and school and community resources as well as building school and home relationships. There were no discrepant perspectives from the participants regarding the reasons chronic absenteeism is a problem.

## **Results**

### **Findings Addressing RQ1**

Two themes related to RQ1 emerged from the data. Theme 1 aligned with Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem and showed that factors in the daily interpersonal relationships of family and child and child and school cause chronic absenteeism. Theme 1 also addressed the participants' perspectives

regarding the causes of chronic absenteeism for students at home. Lack of transportation, sickness, lack of means, poor motivation and indifferent attitudes, unsafe home environment, poor parental guidance, and homelessness/eviction emerged as causes from the data. Theme 2 addressed the participants' perspectives about the causes of chronic absenteeism for students at school and included bullying, poor academic skills, and poor parent/teacher relationships.

**Theme 1: Causes of chronic absenteeism for students at home.** The participants' narratives revealed their perspectives regarding the causes of chronic absenteeism for students at home in Grades 1–3 at a high-poverty, low performing elementary school in Mississippi.

***Lack of transportation.*** All 16 participants suggested that lack of transportation was a cause of chronic absenteeism for students at home. The participants in each group (i.e., parents, educators, and staff) provided their views. P1 explained,

My children stay up late and do not want to get up in the morning. They have to ride the bus, but by the time they get up and get ready to go, they missed the bus. I don't have a car to take them to school, so they just miss school.

E2 responded, "Children will miss school because they missed the bus, and there is no car at home. Children that walk to school within a 1-mile radius will miss school due to lack of transportation." S1 provided additional information regarding transportation difficulties:

Over 80% of our parents are single moms with limited income and do not have a car to bring the child to school if the child oversleeps and missed the bus. They

keep the child home from school because they do not have a way to get them to school if they live within the 2-mile distance that allows them to be a bus rider.

***Sickness.*** All 16 participants indicated that sickness was also a cause of chronic absenteeism for students at home. P4 explained, “Sometimes my son said that he was sick. My child will miss school when he has a stomachache or fever.” E5 gave a detailed account of sickness in school:

Mostly, sickness is one reason for students’ inconsistent attendance. This year was especially difficult for children, teachers, and parents because of the flu and strep throat outbreak during the fall of the year. This outbreak was followed by the district policy notification sent home regarding preventing spreading sickness. S1 stated, “Most of our young parents will not insist that the child attend school when they say that they are sick. The parent will allow the child to miss school when the child says that he or she is sick.”

***Lack of means.*** All 16 participants implied that children would miss school due to lack of means, such as having clean uniforms to wear at home. P5 elaborated,

Sometimes children are not in school because of dirty uniforms. I ran into a couple of parents at the laundromat, and a child was there with the parents. I asked the parents why the child was not in school. I was told that the child did not have clean clothes to wear.

E4 added,

Students will stay home because they are ashamed of their clothes. The uniforms that they have to wear to school are often dirty by the end of the week, and there

is no washing machine in the home. Parents do not have money to go to the laundromat to wash the uniforms.

S3 also pointed out that there is a “lack of clean uniforms, and there is no washer or dryer in the home. Parents do not have transportation to the laundromat.”

Nine of the participants (i.e., five parents, three educators, and one school support staff) stated that a lack of means, such as not having an alarm clock, was a cause of chronic absenteeism. P1 stated, “I don’t have a clock to wake them up in time, so they miss school.” E4 affirmed, “Children have often stated that they miss school because they do not have an alarm clock.” S1 pointed out,

Many of our parents don’t have an alarm clock because they do not work and do not have the money to buy this simple item. This is a high-poverty neighborhood, and the lack of a simple item as an alarm clock will cause the child to miss school.

***Poor motivation and an indifferent attitude.*** Four parents, three educators, and one school support staff shared their perspectives regarding poor motivation and an indifferent attitude as causes of chronic absenteeism for students at home. P1 stated, “Sometimes there is a lack of motivation at home. The child does not want to attend school and the parent does not insist that the child attend. The child might want to stay home with mama.” E2 explained,

Parents did not like school because they had a negative experience in school when they attended school, or parents could have had a negative experience with their child’s teacher. Therefore, they might not support the school the way school needs parents to support the school.

S3 responded, “Parents will sometimes think that missing days not important. Parents tend to think that they are doing alright without an education, and the child will be successful as well, even if they miss days from school.”

***Unsafe home environment.*** All of the parents and educators indicated that an unsafe home environment was a cause of chronic absenteeism for students at home. None of the four school support staff specified that an unsafe home environment was a cause of chronic absenteeism for students. Both parents and educators revealed that substance abuse occurs in the home and could be a cause for chronic absenteeism.

P5 elaborated,

Some children are not at school because their parents are on drugs and are quarreling all night, and the children miss school. The quarreling might cause the child to be abused and scared. The child will miss school to hide scares from the child being abused.

E5 added, “Some of the family situations that prevent children from attending school consistently are based on family dynamics such as parents’ drug abuse. Sometimes the drug use will cause the child to be abused by parent.”

***Poor parental assistance.*** All 16 participants implied that poor parental assistance was a cause of chronic absenteeism for students at home and shared detailed responses.

P6 explained, “Younger children need help with getting ready for school in the morning. A child can miss school when the child has no assistance to get them ready for school.”

E4 stated,

In over 20 years that I have worked in this district, I have taught second and third grades. I have observed that students as early as second and third grades have to get younger siblings ready for school. Sometimes mom is not home when children leave for school, and this causes the children to have a lot of absences.”

S4 noted,

A large number of absenteeism occurs when parents rely on [the] child to get ready for school. Parents might oversleep, and the child is left on his/her own to get ready for school. When this happens, the child might choose to stay home.

***Homelessness/eviction.*** All 16 participants indicated that homelessness and eviction were causes of chronic absenteeism for students at home. In addition, being placed in a foster home prevented students from attending school. Participant P5 stated,

Some children are not at school because the family has been evicted and homeless. When the family has no place to stay and maybe staying with relatives, children miss school. I know of a time when the family had to place the child in a foster home until the family found another place to stay. Moving around caused the child to miss days from school.

E5 gave this detailed account:

There are unfortunate family situations that prevent children from attending school consistently. For an example, being evicted and homeless because the family experienced financial problems caused absences. There have been times when families are placed on [the] McKinney Homeless Assistance Act for homeless families. This agency will help the family to find another residence and

pay the rent for a while. The child will miss school when a legal agency gets involved, and the child is removed from [the] home for safety. Just recently, the mother and child were in a shelter for both of their safety. Problems like this will prevent children from attending school consistently.

S1 replied,

When children are taken out of home and placed in a foster care for the child's safety, [this] causes absences. [The] family [is] moving constantly due to unpaid rent contributed to absenteeism. Absences are caused when Child Protective Services has gotten involved with [the] situation when the mother and child flee the home and are placed in a shelter.

**Theme 2: Causes of chronic absenteeism for students at school.** Theme 2 addressed three causes at school that prevents attendance: bullying, poor academic skills, and poor parent/teacher relationships.

***Bullying.*** All 16 participants indicated that students would miss school because students are afraid of being bullied. Each participant viewed bullying as a cause for chronic absenteeism for various reasons for students at school. P1 stated,

Children will miss school when they are picked on. Bullying and mean kids [are] in school and [therefore, the] children do not want to come to school. Sometimes being picked on for dirty uniforms will cause a child to stay home. Poor hygiene will cause children to be bullied. When a child comes to school with dirty uniforms, kids are mean to them. This led to a bad attitude for the child who gets bullied, and the child refuses to go to school.

E4 concurred,

Students will miss school because they are afraid of being bullied. Bullying by mean kids is a reason children miss days from school. Some students are being abused at home, and when they come to school and are bullied, they might feel that they may as well stay home.

S2 also agreed that bullying was a cause of absenteeism,

Bullying is a major issue among children across the country. Children have said that they are being bullied, and there is a fear of retaliation if the child decided to tell his or her teacher. Children will become afraid and will choose to stay home.

**Poor academic skills.** Twelve participants believed that poor academic skills was a reason for chronic absenteeism for students at the school. All of the parents and educators provided extensive narratives regarding this cause. P6 stated,

Sometimes children have missed days from school and don't understand the lessons. When children get behind, and after so many days, the child decides they do not want to go to school. They might feel that they are not as smart as their peers, and they did not want to attend school.

E5 gave this account:

Children get behind and are ashamed about not knowing the material that is being taught. When a student's attendance is inconsistent, the level of academic instruction is impacted for students. Students have 180 days to master state curriculum, so when students miss day's instruction, learning is jeopardized.



Students who miss days are at risk and will have difficulties with catching up with missed assignments, and they tend to miss more days.

***Poor parent/teacher relationship.*** All 16 participants indicated that a poor parent/teacher relationship was a cause of chronic absenteeism for students at school. P3 noted, “When the teacher calls the parents to complain about their child’s behavior, the parent might feel that the teacher does not like the child. Parents will become upset when teachers call [their] job about [the] child’s behavior.” E4 explained,

Parents might have had a bad experience when they were students and will sometimes view the child’s teacher the same way. This attitude could cause the parent to avoid the child’s teacher and will cause the child to miss days.

S4 noted,

Oftentimes, parents feel unwelcome at school by teachers. It depends on the culture or the customer service that the school presents. When teachers and parents fail to communicate in a positive way, and parents feel that the child is not cared for, parents will not think education is important and will keep the child home.

### **Findings Addressing RQ2 (Theme 3): Educating Parents and Teachers**

The recommendations, both at home and at school, included: improve parental guidance, building positive relationships (teacher/student and parent/teacher), educating parents and teachers about bullying, educating teachers on positive reinforcement, providing information about alternative transportation, and educating parents and teachers about attendance policies.

The third theme from the data collected from the participants' interviews focused on a total of eight recommendations for students both at home (one) and at school (seven) to increase and sustain attendance. The recommendations fit under Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory and included the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem. Within Theme 3, the data focused on one recommendation by the participants for students at home to increase and sustain attendance: improve parental guidance.

***Improve parental guidance.*** Twelve participants suggested that to “improve parental guidance” would help students at home to increase and sustain attendance. Two parents, six educators, and the four school support staff provided their perspectives. P2 stated,

Parents should make sure that the child goes to bed on time to make sure the child gets adequate rest. It is important to always stress the importance of attending school daily. Parents with alarm clocks ought to use them and have the child prepare for school the night before by checking to see that uniforms are clean.

S1 suggested,

The district should hold parents accountable for the child's attendance. After 5 days, the attendance officer reaches out to find out why the child is missing school. This is the first policy. The next policy, after 12 days, it becomes criminal. Parents might have to pay a fine, and after this, there could be jail time. Probably, if this policy was enforced, more children would miss less days.

Within Theme 3, the data included seven recommendations by the participants to increase and sustain attendance at school.

***Building positive relationships (teacher/student).*** All 16 participants agreed that building a positive teacher/student relationship for students at school would increase and sustain attendance. P6 stated,

Kids want to feel welcome. Greet children as they enter the door, a happy greeter.

Be familiar with students who miss school. Teachers should make the classroom a fun place to learn so the child will enjoy coming to school.

E2 remarked,

Schools tend to focus more on the ones who are present rather than the students who are not there. There should be attention given to students who are not in the classroom. Classroom teachers should look for patterns of absences and contact the parents concerning a pattern of absences.

S3 also discussed communication between school and parents: “The school could address needs of absences. There could be more communication with parents to determine what could be done to increase attendance.”

***Building positive relationships (parent/teacher).*** All 16 participants recommended building positive parent/teacher relationships at school to increase and sustain attendance. P6 explained,

Teachers should let parents know that they care by calling the parents to discuss the child’s progress, especially if the child is falling behind or if the child misses days. Schools tend to focus more on the ones who are present rather than the students who are not there.

E3 suggested,

The school should build a relationship with each child and parents; encourage parents to visit classroom. A rapport or relationship will help to improve attendance. Address a pattern of absenteeism as soon as it is observed and not ignored. Call parents when [the] child has had a good day rather than only calling when there is a problem.

S1 stated,

Involve parents more in the child's education. Communicate to parents the importance of the child attending regularly, even in the [*sic*] kindergarten and first grades. Maybe the parents are not aware of the importance of coming to school. You can never assume that parents are aware of the importance of coming to school. Things that you think a person should know are not necessarily what is known.

***Educating parents and teachers about bullying.*** All 16 participants recommended educating parents and teachers about bullying to help students at school to increase and sustain attendance. P1 shared, "Sometimes my child will come home and tell me that another child was bullying a student in the class. I wanted to know if the teacher was told. Teachers should listen when students have a problem." E3 explained that there should be "education classes for parents to look for signs of bullying and students being bullied. Maybe the parents are not aware of signs that their child is being bullied." S1 also noted, "We could decrease bullying when we plan to educate teachers and parents on signs of bullying. Workshops on bullying should be provided for all teachers."

***Educating teachers on positive reinforcement.*** All parents, educators, and two school support staff indicated that there is a need for educating teachers on positive reinforcement for students at school to increase and sustain attendance. It was indicated that awards are used by educators as reinforcements; however, it was there is a need to provide reinforcements more frequently by all teachers to increase and sustain attendance. P5 commented, “Teachers could give awards more frequent maybe weekly. On Friday, kids get surprises, and they look forward to attending school on Friday. On Wednesday, the child [could] get a ticket to wear jeans on Friday.” E3 gave this account:

Little children need short term recognition. Use the attendance chart in class and give weekly awards for perfect attendance. Pull them aside and remind them when they come to school that there are incentives for coming to school. Show them the treasure box with incentives in case they have not seen it. Start with small goals, such as coming to school each day in a week, an attainable goal.

Then go to another reachable goal of adding days, maybe 2 weeks.

S4 added, “Students enjoy getting awards. If each teacher provides awards often for improved and perfect attendance, students might attend more consistently.”

***Educating parents and teachers about school and community resources.*** All of the parents and educators and one of the school support staff recommended educating parents and teachers about school and community resources to help students at school to increase and sustain attendance. P4 stated, Children might attend more often if teachers have clothes and other items for students with

hygiene problems to freshen up. Maybe there could be a closet with clothes with various sizes, hygiene products, and a private space to freshen up.

E1 noted, “Sometimes parents are not aware of resources that are available for them or their children. Tell parents about agencies with clothes and household items.” S3 pointed out,

Schools could solicit resources from outside the school. Maybe involve the community and churches to donate to families. Inform families and school support staff of the services that are available in the community. Get acquainted with agencies that serve families to help with improving attendance. Seek funding from the community to help with budget cuts. When funds are cut, the expectations to succeed for the students remain the same.

***Providing information about alternate transportation.*** Four parents and two educators shared that providing information about alternate transportation was a method for students at school to increase and sustain students’ attendance. None of the school support staff recommended providing information about alternate transportation to increase and sustain attendance. P2 shared a policy for alternate transportation:

There could be a late van for students who constantly miss school. This could help parents to get children to school when they have missed the bus when the child oversleeps. . . . The school should have a policy in place for riding the late van. Parents should not use the late van as an alternate of catching the bus.

Children need to still get ready on time to get the bus to school.

E6 also provided a suggestion:

Many of our parents live in the same housing area for low-income families, and their children are in the same classes. A number of parents drive their children to school when they live too close to ride the bus. The school could acquaint parents without cars with parents with cars at the same school. Parents should come together to encourage each other and share resources to help children attend school regularly.

***Educating parents and teachers about attendance policies.*** All 16 participants agreed that educating parents and teachers about the attendance policies would help students at school increase and sustain attendance. P4 stated, “At the beginning of school, handbooks should be given to parents so they will know about the attendance policy. If the child misses school often, there should be consequences for the parents when the child misses days.” E5 suggested, “Educate parents on attendance policy for students. Remind parents regularly about the attendance policy. Remind parents that they could receive a fine when [the] child misses excessive days.” S1 noted that “there should be workshops for educators and programs for parents on attendance policies for the district.”

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness, in this basic qualitative study, was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Houghton et al., 2013). I established credibility by member checking, which allowed the participants an opportunity to check the accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2012; Harper & Cole, 2012). A typed summary of the study’s findings was e-mailed to each participant, and all responded that they agreed with its accuracy. Harper and Cole (2012) explained that

allowing the participants the opportunity to read a summary of the study findings in qualitative research helps to improve accuracy, credibility, and validity.

Lodico et al. (2010) suggested that transferability can be determined by the reader through a detailed account of the study by the researcher. Thick, rich descriptions of the findings and setting are provided to the reader in this study. Transferability of results depends on whether the reader can determine if these can be transferred to a similar area or situation (Anney, 2014). The reader must determine if the parameters of the study fit their area of research or can be applied to similar situations.

The dependability of this basic qualitative research was established by providing details of when and how the data were collected and data analyzed. These details provide other researchers with a step-by-step procedure to duplicate the study (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). Further dependability was established by the participants in the study who confirmed the accuracy of the summary of findings.

Confirmability for the study was established by reflexivity to address any bias I had as a researcher. Creswell (2012) explained that reflexivity allows the researcher to reveal and write out their biases and beliefs. I wrote my thoughts in the margin of the interview protocol document before, during, and after the interviews rather than expressing them aloud to the participants. Potential bias could have affected the research process and findings of the study if not addressed prior to collecting the data (Creswell, 2012). I did not interject my personal feelings, thoughts, or biases into the data analysis. I referred to my prewritten thoughts, feelings, and biases, as well as those I wrote out



during the interviews. Another measure to prevent bias occurred when the participants read and checked for accuracy in the summary of findings.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I provided in-depth information on the setting for this study, the participants' demographics, data collection and analysis, the results of the study, and evidence of trustworthiness. Data were collected by conducting in-depth one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions that allowed the participants to answer freely. Data were analyzed thematically using a priori and open codes from the conceptual framework, Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems theory. Two themes emerged to answer RQ1. Theme 1 is Causes of chronic absenteeism for students at home. Theme 2 is Causes of chronic absenteeism for students at school. A third theme emerged that addressed RQ2: Educating parents and teachers, which included education on attendance policies, school and community resources, and building school and home relationships are recommended to increase and sustain students' attendance. Member checking was used to allow participants an opportunity to check the accuracy of their data.

In Chapter 5, the interpretation of findings is confirmed by comparing the causes of student absence with the research literature and conceptual framework. The limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and conclusions are also discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of six parents, six educators, and four school support staff regarding the causes of chronic absenteeism of students in Grades 1-3 in a high-poverty, low-performing school in Mississippi and gather their recommendations to increase and sustain attendance. The following RQs guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of parents, educators, and school support staff of the causes of chronic absenteeism in Grades 1–3 at a high-poverty, low-performing school as explored through ecological systems theory?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of parents, educators, and school support staff regarding recommendations to increase and sustain students' attendance in Grades 1–3?

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The findings in this study extend knowledge in the area of chronic absenteeism and confirm the research discussed in Chapter 2. Previous studies have addressed chronic absenteeism and the negative outcomes for students in U.S. history (Allensworth & Evans, 2016; Balfanz, 2016; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2017; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Sugrue et al., 2016). To date, however, there had been no single study that provided the perspectives of parents, educators, and school support staff concerning the causes of chronic absenteeism in Grades 1–3 at a high-poverty, low-performing school. Gottfried (2014) pointed out that chronic absenteeism in the early years has not been documented or researched sufficiently. Chang et al. (2016) noted that

there is a need to focus on absences as early as kindergarten and first grade, which could lead to weak reading skills by third grade and truancy in later years. The data obtained from the participants in this study helps close the research gap regarding the reasons for chronic absenteeism for students in Grades 1–3 in high-poverty, low-performing schools.

### **Theme 1: Causes of Chronic Absenteeism for Students at Home**

**Lack of transportation (microsystem).** Lack of transportation was a cause for students at home to be chronically absent. Findings in this study confirm the research discussed in the literature review. Sugrue et al.'s (2016) study of students in Grades K–5 indicated that truancy could be due to problems in the home, including transportation problems. In a qualitative exploratory study in Detroit schools, Lenhoff and Pogodzinski (2018) found that transportation was a factor that influenced chronic absenteeism. Swartz (2015) also noted that a pattern of chronic absenteeism might be caused by a lack of transportation.

This finding is supported by the microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory. Lack of transportation is indeed part of the child's immediate environment that can affect a child's academic progress. If parents do not value or believe their child's education is important, seeking a means of transportation may put the child in conflict with teachers' attitudes towards regular daily attendance, which may add to chronic absenteeism.

**Sickness (microsystem).** Sickness, a reason for absenteeism at the research site, aligned with the findings of prior studies (i.e., Eunjung et al., 2019; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Kim, Gee, & Byrd, in press). Eunjung et al. (2019) conducted a study with students

aged 6 to 17, which included students in Grades 1–3, to examine the effect of asthma and the use of an inhaler on attendance. Their findings indicated that children were more at risk for being chronically absent when an inhaler was necessary for this condition. Gottfried and Gee (2017) concluded that children with asthma are 3.2 times more likely to be chronically absent. Kim et al. (in press) also found that there is a link between younger school children with asthma and chronic absenteeism. Asthma, as a cause for chronic absenteeism, was not mentioned by the participants in this study but has been determined to contribute to this behavior in the literature.

Chronic absenteeism due to illness also aligns with the microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory. As mentioned in the findings, there was an outbreak of influenza and strep throat within the school district that affected students' daily attendance and academic progress. When these instances occur, the connection between home and school can become strained; however, the bigger concern is for children who pretend to be ill and stay at home with the mother. These interpersonal interactions between parent and child are contingent on the family's beliefs and value of education and can come into tension with teachers' attitudes concerning regular daily attendance.

**Lack of means (microsystem).** A lack of means (i.e., poverty) and the family mindset in a low-income environment was a cause of chronic absenteeism at the research site in this study. For many students in this situation, they will stay home because their school uniforms are dirty and/or there is no means (i.e., no alarm clock) for children to be awakened in time for school. Dirty uniforms are common because there is no washing

machine in the home. This results in students missing school to go to the laundromat with a parent. The second concern, no alarm clock, results in children and parents oversleeping. Part of the issue with oversleeping is due to parents not having a set bedtime for children and not enforcing this time.

Sugrue et al. (2016) supported the notion that poverty was linked to chronic absenteeism. As mentioned previously, when there is a lack of means, students miss school. When financial means to care for the child are missing in the home, daily attendance at school and academic progress will suffer. In these instances, interactions within the family occur but are minimal with teachers when a student miss school. Once again, within the microsystem, the child's family unit and familial attitudes and beliefs determine what will happen in the child's schooling as it relates to school attendance.

**Poor motivation and an indifferent attitude (microsystem).** In this study, poor motivation and an indifferent attitude were identified as reasons for chronic absenteeism; however, this was not noted to be a factor in the literature. Research has shown that parents' perspectives on consistent daily attendance may be related to the beliefs and values of their own families (Powell, 2012). Powell (2012) noted that parents' views on school attendance are frequently based on their own childhoods.

Parents' views of chronic absenteeism might be generational (Swartz, 2015) and is often overlooked. A parent overlooking this issue will influence their children's education. This finding aligns with the microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory because of the interactions within the family and family attitudes and beliefs about school. Interactions with teachers are missing in this finding.

Without teachers' interactions with children, the problem with chronic absenteeism is compounded.

**Unsafe home environment (microsystem).** An unsafe home environment was a reason for chronic absenteeism discovered in this study, confirming what was reported in the literature. Both parents and educators noted that the home could be unsafe because of substance abuse occurs there and that this could be a reason for absenteeism. Chang et al. (2016) and Cook et al. (2017) indicated that substance abuse contributed to student absences. Allen et al. (2018) and Eunjung et al. (2019) also found that missing school could be due to problems in the home, including substance abuse, which may also lead to other unfavorable behavioral and academic outcomes (Maynard et al., 2017; Skedgell & Kearney, 2018).

The finding of substance abuse leading to an unsafe home environment is supported by the microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory. Like the other findings, an unsafe home environment due to parental substance abuse influences interactions within the family and family attitudes and beliefs. Parental substance abuse will affect the child's life, including their daily attendance at school.

**Poor parental guidance (microsystem).** The data in this study also indicated that poor parental guidance was a cause of chronic absenteeism, confirming what has been found in the literature. Robinson et al. (2018) and a report by Attendance Works (2013) noted that reducing absences in the early grades is linked to parents. Other researchers have also determined that the guidance of parents is needed to decrease this behavior (Gottfried, 2014; Smythe-Leistico & Page, 2018). Smythe-Leistico and Page (2018)

explained that parents have the responsibility to ensure their children have consistent daily attendance.

Parental guidance is supported by the microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory. The child's family and family mindsets and values directly influence parents' supervision of their children's actions that determine what the child does at home and at school. If parents are not consistent or insistent regarding their children's attendance at school, the problem of chronic absenteeism will continue to occur at the research site.

**Homelessness/eviction (exosystem).** Homelessness/eviction were reasons for chronic absenteeism established both in this study and in the literature. Family situations that prevent children from attending school include being evicted, homelessness, and being placed in a foster home. The Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness (2015) reported that students who are homeless are likely to be chronically absent. Students who transfer to other schools, live in foster homes, or move in with relatives due to homelessness will have high absentee rates (Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness, 2015). Sugrue et al. (2016) also referenced homelessness as a reason for student absence.

Homelessness/eviction is supported by the exosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory because it is an event that will influence the child's growth and development. This occurrence involves the child's family, home, school, and other institutions (e.g., legal services), which can have a positive or negative effect if a child has inconsistent daily attendance.

## **Theme 2: Causes of Chronic Absenteeism for Students at School**

**Bullying (mesosystem).** Bullying was determined to cause chronic absenteeism in this study, confirming the findings in the research literature. Bosworth et al. (2018) found that being bullied in school is a factor that causes absences, and Gren-Landell et al. (2015) reported that children would miss school when they worry about being bullied. Lenhoff and Pogodzinski (2018) also noted that school safety was among factors that could influence chronic absenteeism.

Bullying is supported by the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological theory. The mesosystem is the child's environment that consists of interactions with two microsystems. When the child is bullied, there is an active interaction with the child's environment and others in the school environment. Bullying, which occurs in the mesosystem, has a negative influence on the child's well-being. Bullying is relevant to this study if it caused the child to have inconsistent daily attendance.

**Poor academic skills (mesosystem).** The findings in this study indicated that students' poor academic skills could be the basis for chronic absenteeism, which was also confirmed in previous research. Chronic absenteeism leads to a lack of skills, not only for students who are chronically absent, but also for their peers (Gottfried, 2015b; Weinberger & Forbush, 2018). Gottfried (2015b) explained that students who are a part of a class where their peers are chronically absent would not get the full benefit of instructional time from their teachers. Weinberger and Forbush (2018) noted that teachers spend quality instructional time repeating missed lessons when students miss class, which leads to an interruption in instruction for those who have consistent daily attendance.



Weinberger and Forbush explained that chronic absenteeism has negative educational outcomes for all students in the classroom.

Poor academic skills are supported by the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological system. The two microsystems that are related to the child's poor academic skills consist of the child's home environment where there is a lack of parental assistance for homework, and the child's school environment when the teacher has to spend extra instructional time with students who are chronically absent.

**Poor parent-teacher relationship (mesosystem).** The findings of this study specify that a poor parent-teacher relationship was also a reason for chronic absenteeism. Poor relationships between parent and teacher originate from the school environment or the home setting. According to the findings, teachers may place phone calls, which are generally complaints of children's behavior or academic performance, to parents at home or at the place of employment. These calls often bring back memories of similar instances when parents were children. Compounding parents' current experiences with their memories leads to a negative home environment for the family.

Tense relationships between parents and teachers become evident when teachers present a negative environment for parents. For example, in the findings, if parents feel unwelcome at the school, parents transfer this perception to their children. Parents think the unwelcome attitude exhibited by school personnel is transmitted to their children, resulting in their children not receiving due care. Parents will refrain from sending their children to school and education becomes unimportant.

Robinson et al. (2018) verified that strained relationships between parents and teachers in low-income schools may influence chronic absenteeism. As in the current study, they found parents with negative experiences with the school personnel led to less value placed on school and school attendance.

These findings are supported by the conceptual framework, especially for the mesosystem. These interactions between the teachers and the parents, both previous and current, involve the parents and their children. In this instance, Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) mesosystem encompasses parents' prior school and current parent-school experiences with interactions with their children. An incident that happened in the mesosystem, such as similar interactions with school personnel and the child or the parent, may result in irregular daily attendance.

### **Theme 3: Educating Parents and Teachers**

**Improve parental guidance (microsystem).** The participants in this study recommended that there is a need to improve parental guidance at home to increase and sustain students' attendance, which aligns with the research literature. The participants indicated that parents must encourage attendance at home, stress the importance of attending school daily, and hold themselves accountable.

Smythe-Leistico and Page (2018) pointed out that parents have the responsibility to ensure that their children attend school consistently. According to a report by the Ad Council (2015), some educators believe that parents have misconceptions including that absences are not important in the early grades, or that "attendance is more of a compliance issue and less about an opportunity to learn" (p. 5). The report noted that

teachers believed parents do not understand that a pattern of missing school in the early years will influence consistent attendance in the future (Ad Council, 2015).

This finding is supported by the microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory. If parental guidance improves, the child becomes the central figure because of positive interactions among the family, school, and teachers. The notion is to change parents' attitudes and beliefs about the value of an education and school attendance, which might connect to consistent daily school attendance in school for the child.

**Building positive relationships teacher/student (mesosystem).** A

recommendation from the participants in this study was that building a positive relationship between the teacher and student at school was a way to increase and sustain attendance. This recommendation is confirmed by what has been found in the literature. The participants' recommended that teachers should make students feel welcome, make the classroom fun, look for patterns of absences, and contact parents concerning these absences. Sugrue et al. (2016) noted that if students perceived that teachers were not attentive to their concerns, then they might miss school.

This finding is supported by Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) theory. For school attendance to improve, all dealings within the child's microsystems must be strengthened. In this case, the microsystems are school and home. When teachers are deliberate to address known concerns and make the school experience a positive one for children, the bond between the teacher and student translates to a positive experience between the school and home environments. The result may be an increased school attendance.

**Building positive relationships parent/teacher (mesosystem).** The participants in this study recommended that building a positive relationship between the parent and teacher at school was a way to increase and sustain attendance. Building positive relationships between parents and the teachers could occur if teachers would initiate communication that shows the parents the teacher cares about their child. Instead of a phone call when the child has misbehaved or fails an assignment, parents could take the other extreme, and call to share the child's academic and/or behavioral progress. When teachers emphasize the positive behaviors and academic progress, then parents are more inclined to support the notion of consistent daily school attendance. Sadiku and Sylaj's (2019) quantitative study was conducted in Kosovo in Southeast Europe to determine the influence of positive parent/teacher relationships to improve academic achievement and outcomes. The results suggested that parent/teacher relationships have a positive influence on the students' academic outcomes.

This finding is supported by the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) theory. The school environment (teachers, per se) is one microsystem and the home environment (parents) is the other. Working toward positive interactions and relationships between key people in the child's life changes the emphasis from separation to one of unity. The child and the child's welfare are central, thus having the potential to reduce chronic absenteeism.

**Educating teachers on positive reinforcement (mesosystem).** The participants believed that professional development for teachers on positive reinforcements was needed for students at school to increase and sustain attendance. The participants stated

that positive reinforcements are used by educators; however, there is a need to provide positive reinforcements more frequently as children need short-term recognition. Free breakfasts and lunches at school also provide positive reinforcement for regular attendance.

Balfanz and Byrnes (2018) supported the notion of positive reinforcement in the school setting. Positive reinforcement in the form of external rewards, such as gift certificates and special privileges for the child, and a call to the child's home in an effort may improve consistent daily attendance. It should be noted that positive reinforcement, offered when awarded for specific instances, have the desired outcomes.

Professional development to show teachers how to implement praise for students as positive reinforcement has been effective to increase student learning and to decrease disruptive classroom behavior (Simonsen et al. 2020). Simonsen et al. (2020) explained that the practice of implementing praise in classroom was more effective when educators used praise with the positive expectation that the students' academic outcomes would be positive.

The practice of the teachers implementing praise for students aligns with the mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) theory. The mesosystem, which consists of two microsystems (professional development and the teachers' praise), could interact to promote a positive influence on the child's environment. Training teachers on when and how to use positive reinforcement might encourage the child to want to attend school.

**Educating parents and teachers about school and community resources**

(mesosystem). According to the participants, educating parents and teachers about school and community resources is needed to increase and sustain attendance. Participants understand that parents and teachers may not be aware of school bullying and its effect on school attendance. Both groups require workshops or programs to increase and sustain student attendance. Bullying prevention has been implemented in schools for students from kindergarten through high school (Ostrander, Melville, Bryan & Letendre, 2018). Ostrander et al. (2018) addressed students who were the aggressors with bullying and those students who are being bullied. A bullying prevention program can provide strategies for teachers, school support staff, administrators, and includes the family and students.

Educating parents and teachers on school and community resources is also needed. Teachers need to be aware of the resources within the school, such as clothes closets and hygiene items, and shared with parents. Resources are found within the local community and it is important to inform parents and teachers about clothing banks and household items in the community and community agencies that provide assistance to families of poverty. It is also imperative for the community to form relationships with teachers to assist students and families who need assistance (Walter, 2018). Walter (2018) pointed out that in many high-poverty areas, there are numerous support coordinators who supply resources to teachers, students, and families in low-income communities. The support from communities includes “food, clothes, and school supplies” (Walter, 2018, p. 31)

These findings support the mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) theory. This system consists of families, educators, and community institutions (two or more microsystems) that can potentially exert an influence on a child. Educating parents and teachers will not be part of the child's immediate environment, but the interactions in the microsystems that make up the mesosystem can have a positive effect on the child. The goal is increased and sustained daily school attendance.

**Providing information about alternate transportation (microsystem).** The recommendation of providing information about alternate transportation adds to what is found in the literature. A study by Sugrue et al. (2016) addressed transportation for students; however, there was no mention of providing alternate transportation for students to increase and sustain attendance. Sugrue et al. noted that a lack of transportation hindered consistent attendance. This finding is supported by the microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory, as the transportation for the child occurs in the child's home environment.

**Educating parents and teachers about attendance policies (exosystem).** The participants recommended educating parents and teachers about attendance policies for students at school to increase and sustain their attendance, which aligned with previous literature. Informing parents and teachers about attendance requirements and the benefits of regularly attending school could have positive consequences for student achievement (Attendance Works, 2018a). Programs such as Parents as Teachers have shown improvement in a child's overall development and academic skills but also in improving parents' behaviors and teachers' understanding of a child's home life (Lahti, Evans,

Goodman, Schmidt, & LeCroy, 2019). This finding is supported by the exosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1993) ecological systems theory as these would be decisions made without the child, but that would ultimately affect the child. In this case, the exosystem consists of the parents and teachers working together, and although this would affect the child, the child is not directly involved.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The research design for this study on chronic absenteeism was limited to a basic qualitative approach with 16 participants, which included six parents and six educators of students in Grades 1-3, a secretary, a data processor, a social worker, and the DOPS in a high-poverty, a low-performing elementary school in Mississippi. A basic qualitative research approach can be a weakness because the study is conducted and the data were collected, analyzed, and evaluated by one researcher (Creswell, 2012). I was the sole researcher in this study. Throughout this process, I served as scheduler and interviewer.

A limitation is the transferability of the findings to another setting different from this study. Lodico et al. (2010) suggested that transferability can be determined by the reader of the research through a detailed account of the study. I provided thick, rich descriptions in this study. Transferability of results depends on whether the reader can determine if these can be transferred to a similar area or situation (Anney, 2014) and if the parameters of the study fit the area to be researched.

Throughout the study, I was conscious of my personal beliefs (Moustakas, 1994). As a precautionary measure to address my biases, I drafted open-ended interview questions and developed an interview protocol document, so I did not interject my



thoughts or feelings into the interview. The interview questions were reviewed by two professors at a local college to ensure the questions were adequate to answer the RQs and that they were clear. To refrain from expressing my thoughts aloud during the interviews, I wrote these in the margin of the interview protocol before, during, after the interviews. There were no limitations regarding trustworthiness.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

There continues to be a need for further research regarding the reasons students are chronically absent in the early years. Gottfried (2014) pointed out that chronic absenteeism has not been well recorded or studied for all students. I recommend a study that examines different grade levels, uses a larger population sample, and explores areas that are demographically dissimilar from this study, such as a rural area, the Mississippi Delta, or inner-city, high-poverty areas in eastern, northern, and western states that might provide reasons for chronic absenteeism. London et al. (2016) suggested that studies in other areas of the country with different populations are needed to document the reasons students fail to attend school consistently. I recommend a study with students in Grades 1-3 in another high-poverty area to determine whether providing adequate resources at schools such as school uniforms, toiletries, and a private space at school would increase and sustain students' attendance.

Amalu and Abang (2016) suggested that the problem of chronic absenteeism in the primary grades could determine whether a child will or will not be academically successful in future years. I recommend a longitudinal study that focuses on students in low-income areas who already perform below national standards to establish whether

consistent daily attendance could positively influence better reading skills by the third grade.

### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

Positive social change can begin by informing parents, students, educators, and school staff at the research site about the findings of this study regarding causes for chronic absenteeism. In addition, parents, students, educators, and school support staff should be informed that there is a need to increase and sustain daily attendance to improve students' achievement, which can be done with collaboration with and resources from the community. Social change may occur with the education of parents, students, educators, school staff, and the community that chronic absenteeism can begin in the early years and can lead to truancy (Mallett, 2015; Rocque et al., 2017; Zalaznick, 2015). Social change is linked to involving the community with strategies to decrease truancy. Rogers (2014) explained that the community could benefit from involvement as truancy is related to high crime rates, substance abuse, unplanned pregnancies (which add to the welfare rolls), and an increase in unskilled workers.

To achieve positive change at the research site, the school could provide workshops for educators and school support staff to inform them about positive reinforcements and building positive teacher/student and parent/teacher relationships. The school could solicit resources from the community and churches to assist parents and students. Students could benefit from receiving school uniforms, hygiene products, and a private space at school, which might also improve attendance. Parents could benefit by

becoming acquainted with agencies in the community to acquire needed household resources.

Professional development and workshops for educators and school support staff and programs and strategies for parents and students to address bullying as a reason for absenteeism could affect positive change. Mentoring programs for students and parents of students who bully and intimidate their peers as well as for the students and parents of students who are bullied or intimidated could be implemented. There is potential for social change if other high-poverty, low-performing schools in the United States would examine the causes for absence identified in this study. Positive social change might also be achieved if schools and communities would collaborate to determine the needs of students who are chronically absent and provide the resources to increase and sustain attendance.

### **Conclusions**

The findings of this study include three themes regarding the causes of chronic absenteeism and suggestions to improve this problem in Grades 1-3 in a high-poverty, low-performing school in Mississippi. Theme 1 addresses the participants' perspectives about causes of chronic absenteeism for students at home; Theme 2 addresses the participants' perspectives about causes of chronic absenteeism for students at school; and Theme 3 addresses the participants' recommendations to increase and sustain students' attendance.

Based on the findings of this study, there is a need to implement programs, strategies, workshops, and professional development for parents, students, educators, and

school support staff. Professional development and workshops to build positive reinforcement and positive teacher/student and parent/teacher relationships should be provided at school to increase and sustain attendance. The school should offer to mentor parents and students regarding bullying and being bullied and solicit resources from the community and churches to provide resources for students at home and teachers at school. Parents should be informed of agencies in the community that could help to increase and sustain attendance for students. A collaborative effort with families, schools, and communities to address the unfavorable outcomes for students regarding chronic absenteeism and truancy might help to increase consistent attendance, promote high school graduation, and move students from high-poverty households to become productive citizens and parents.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol Document

Topic: Parents' and Educators' Perspectives of Chronic Absenteeism

Strategies to Improve Students' Attendance

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Interviewer:

Interviewee and status: Parent of child in grade \_\_\_\_\_ Educator in grade \_\_\_\_\_

S1 \_\_\_\_\_ S2 \_\_\_\_\_ S3 \_\_\_\_\_ S4 \_\_\_\_\_

Total years of experience \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the study: (a) The purpose of the study. (b) Describe the method that data will be collected. (c) Explain what will be done to protect the confidentiality of the interviewee. (d) How long the interview will take. Have the interviewee read and sign the consent form. Turn the digital audio recorder on and test it. Explain the concept of study is chronic absenteeism. Provide definition of consistent daily attendance (regular daily attendance) and inconsistent daily attendance (chronic absences). A \$10.00 thank you gift was given to each participant for participation in the study. Assure them of their confidentiality.

## **Interview Questions for Parents**

### **Research Question 1: Reasons for Absence**

- Interview question: As a parent, what reasons do children give for not attending school consistently?
- Probes: You said that (reason) was the reason for not attending school. Please elaborate on that reason. Did this reason cause any hardships for the child? If so, how did that hardship affect daily attendance? What did you do to encourage the child to attend school despite the hardship?
- Interview question: What are some family situations that prevent children from attending school regularly?
- Follow-up question: As a parent, what relationships did you establish with school support staff to encourage and continue daily attendance? Were these attempts successful? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Interview question: What are some reasons that children don't want to attend school?
- Follow-up question: As a parent, how did you encourage the child to attend school despite the child's attitude? Were these attempts successful? If so, why? If not, why not?

### **Research Question 2: Recommendations to Increase and Sustain Students'**

#### **Attendance**

- Interview Question: What school policies are there to ensure consistent daily attendance? How did school support staff make you aware of these policies?

- Follow-up question: Based on your knowledge of school attendance policies, what are your responsibilities as a parent? What recommendations do you have to improve school policies for consistent daily attendance?
- Interview question: What incentives are used at this school to encourage consistent daily attendance?
- Interview question: What do you do at home to encourage your child to attend school?
- Interview question: What do you think the principal, assistant principal, educators, and other staff at this school could do to encourage and continue consistent daily attendance?

Please share any additional information that you think is important to this topic.

### **Interview Questions for Educators**

#### **Research Question 1: Reasons for Absences**

- Interview question: As a teacher, what reasons have parents given you for their child not having consistent daily attendance?
- Probes: You said that (reason) was the reason for not attending school. Please elaborate on that reason. Did this reason cause any hardships for the child? If so, what hardships did the family experience that affected daily attendance? What did you do to encourage the child to attend school despite any family hardships?
- Interview question: What are some family situations that prevent children from attending school consistently?
- Follow-up question: As the classroom teacher, what relationships did you establish with the family to address consistent daily attendance despite the family situation? How did you develop a relationship with the family to encourage and continue daily attendance? Were these attempts successful? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Interview question: What are some reasons that children have shared with you for not wanting to attend school?
- Follow-up question: As the classroom teacher, what relationships did you establish with the child to encourage the child to attend school despite the child's attitude? Were these attempts successful? If so, why? If not, why not?

**Research Question 2: Recommendations to Increase and Sustain Students'****Attendance**

- Interview question: What incentives do you use or have you used in the past to encourage consistent daily attendance?
- Probe: Please describe a situation where the incentive was successful. Why did the incentive work? How did you know which incentive to use? Please describe a situation where the incentive wasn't successful. Why didn't it work? What could you have done instead?
- Interview question: In the school district where you are employed, what policies were adopted and implemented to encourage students to have consistent daily attendance?
- Follow-up question: Based on your knowledge of the district's attendance policies, are the goals/objectives/strategies realistic in ensuring consistent daily attendance? If so, why? If not, why not, and what changes should be made to the policies to ensure consistent daily attendance?
- Follow-up question: Based on your position as the classroom teacher, what aspects of the school policies are your responsibilities?
- Interview question: What do you believe parents could do at home to increase and sustain daily attendance?
- Interview question: What do you do daily to encourage your students to come to school the next day?

- Interview question: What else do you believe could be done to encourage students to attend school? At home? At school?

Please share any additional information that you believe is important to this topic.

### **Interview Questions for Data Processor**

#### **Research Question 1: Reasons for Absences**

- Interview question: As the data processor, what reasons have parents given you for children in Grades 1-3 for not having consistent daily attendance?
- Probes: You said that (reason) was the reason for not attending school. Please elaborate on that reason. Did this reason cause any hardships for the child? If so, what hardships did the family experience that affected the child's daily attendance?
- Interview question: What are some family situations that prevent children from attending school consistently?
- Follow-up question: As the data processor, what relationships did you establish with the family to address daily attendance despite the family situation? As the data processor, what relationship did you establish with the classroom teacher to address daily attendance despite the family situation?
- Interview question: What are some reasons that children have shared with you for not wanting to attend school?
- Follow-up question: As the data processor, what relationship did you establish with the child to encourage the child to attend school despite the family situation?

## **Research Question 2: Recommendations to Increase and Sustain Students'**

### **Attendance**

- Interview question: As the data processor, what strategies do you use to encourage and continue student daily attendance? What strategies do you use with family members? What strategies do you use with the child? What strategies do you use with teachers?
- Probe: Which strategy achieved daily attendance? Describe what you did to ensure success. Which strategy didn't achieve daily attendance? What might you do differently to ensure daily attendance?
- Interview question: In the school district where you are employed, what policies were adopted and implemented to encourage students to have consistent daily attendance?
- Probe: Based on your knowledge of the district's attendance policies, are the goals/objectives/strategies realistic in ensuring consistent daily attendance? If so, why? If not, why not, and what changes should be made to the policies to ensure consistent daily attendance?
- Interview question: Based on your position as the data processor, what aspects of the school policies is your responsibility?
- Interview question: What else do you think could be done to provide support to students and their families and school support staff to encourage and continue daily attendance? At home? At school?

Please share any additional information that you believe is important to this topic.



## **Interview Questions for Secretary**

### **Research Question 1: Reasons for Absences**

- Interview question: As the school secretary, what reasons have parents given you for children in Grades 1-3 for not having consistent daily attendance?
- Probes: You said that (reason) was the reason for not attending school. Please elaborate on that reason. Did this reason cause any hardships for the child? If so, what hardships did the family experience that affected the child's daily attendance?
- Interview question: What are some family situations that prevent children from attending school consistently?

### **Research Question 2: Recommendations to Increase and Sustain Students'**

#### **Attendance**

- Interview question: In the school district where you are employed, what policies were adopted and implemented to encourage students to have consistent daily attendance?
- Interview question: Based on your position as the school secretary, what aspects of the school policies are your responsibilities?

Please share any additional information that you believe is important to this topic.

## **Interview Questions for Social Worker**

### **Research Question 1: Reasons for Absences**

- Interview question: In your role as social worker, what reasons have students or their families given you for not consistently attending school daily consistent daily?
- Probes: You said that (reason) was the reason for not attending school. Please elaborate on that reason. Did this reason cause any hardships for the child? If so, what hardships did the family experience that affected the child's daily attendance? What involvement did you have with the family to address daily attendance despite this concern?
- Interview question: What are some family situations that prevent children from attending school consistently?
- Follow-up question: As the social worker, what relationship did you establish with the family to address the family situation?
- Interview question: What are some reasons that children have shared with you for not wanting to attend school?
- Follow-up question: As the social worker, what relationship did you establish with the child and the child's parents to encourage the child to attend school despite the family situation?

**Research Question 2: Recommendations to Increase and Sustain Students'****Attendance**

- Interview question: As the social worker, what strategies do you use to encourage and continue student daily attendance? What strategies do you use with family members? What strategies do you use with the child? What strategies do you use with teachers?
- Probe: Which strategy achieved daily attendance? Describe what you did to ensure success. Which strategy didn't achieve daily attendance? What might you do differently to ensure daily attendance?
- Interview question: In the school district where you are employed, what policies were adopted and implemented to encourage students to have consistent daily attendance?
- Probe: Based on your knowledge of the district's attendance policies, are the goals/objectives/strategies realistic in ensuring consistent daily attendance? If so, why? If not, why not, and what changes should be made to the policies to ensure consistent daily attendance?
- Interview question: What else do you think could be done to provide support to students and their families to encourage and continue daily attendance? At home? At school?

Please share any additional information that you believe is important to this topic.

## **Interview Questions for Dropout Prevention Specialist**

### **Research Question 1: Reasons for Absences**

- Interview question: In your role as dropout prevention specialist, what reasons have students, or their families given you for not consistently attending school daily consistent daily?
- Probes: You said that (reason) was the reason for not attending school. Please elaborate on that reason. Did this reason cause any hardships for the child? If so, what hardships did the family experience that affected daily attendance? In your position as dropout prevention specialist, what action did you take to inform school support staff of the child's family hardships? What strategies did you share to help the administration and teachers deal with the student's daily attendance despite the hardship?
- Interview question: What are some family situations that prevent children from attending school consistently?
- Follow-up question: As the dropout prevention specialist, what relationship did you establish with the family to address the family situation? What relationship did you establish with school support staff to address the family situation?
- Interview question: What are some reasons that children have shared with you for not wanting to attend school?
- Follow-up question: As the dropout prevention specialist, what relationship did you establish with the child to encourage the child to attend school despite

the family situation? What relationship did you establish with the child's family to encourage the child to attend school despite the family situation? What relationships did you establish with school support staff to encourage the child to attend school despite the family situation?

## **Research Question 2: Recommendations to Increase and Sustain Students'**

### **Attendance**

- Interview question: As the dropout prevention specialist, what strategies do you use/recommend to encourage and continue student daily attendance? What strategies do you use/recommend with family members? What strategies do you use/recommend with the child? What strategies do you use/recommend for school support staff?
- Probe: Which strategy achieved daily attendance? Describe what you did to ensure success. Which strategy didn't achieve daily attendance? What recommendations do you suggest to ensure daily attendance?
- Interview question: In the school district where you are employed, what policies were adopted and implemented to encourage students to have consistent daily attendance?
- Probe: Based on your knowledge of the district's attendance policies, are the goals/objectives/strategies realistic in ensuring consistent daily attendance? If so, why? If not, why not, and what changes should be made to the policies to ensure consistent daily attendance?

- Interview question: What else do you think could be done to provide support to students and their families and school support staff to encourage and continue daily attendance? At home? At school?

Please share any additional information that you believe is important to this topic.

## Appendix B: A Priori Codes, Open Codes, Participants, and Excerpts for Research

## Question 1

A Priori Codes	Open Codes	Participants	Excerpts
Microsystem	Needing a ride	P1	"My children have to ride the bus; they miss the bus. I don't have a car, so they just stay home."
		E1	"In most cases, the family has a hard time trying to get their children to school because of transportation."
		S2	"Many parents live too close to school for the child to ride the bus and have no transportation."
	Feeling ill	P5	"When my child says he has a stomach ache, it is usually legit because he likes going to school."
		E5	"Mostly sickness is one reason for students' inconsistent attendance."
		S1	"The parent will allow the child to miss school when the child says he/she is sick."
	Needing clean uniforms	P5	"The child did not have clean clothes."
		E4	"Students will stay home because they are ashamed of their dirty clothes."
	Needing a clock	P1	"I don't have a clock to wake them up in time."
		E4	"They miss school because they do not have an alarm clock."
		S3	"Many of the parents do not have an alarm clock and do not have money to buy this simple item."
	Poor motivation to attend school	P1	"Sometimes there is a lack of motivation at home."
		E2	"Parents might have had a negative experience when they attended school."

A Priori Codes	Open Codes	Participants	Excerpts
		S3	"Parents think that missing school is not important."
	Abuse and drugs	P5	"Some children are not at school because the parents are on drugs and are quarrelling all night."
		E5	"Sometimes the drug use will cause the child to be abused."
	Parental assistance at home	P6	"A child can miss school when the child has no help with getting ready for school."
		S4	"A large number of absenteeism occurs when parents rely on the child to get ready for school."
Mesosystem	Fearful school environment	P1	"Children will miss schools when they are being picked on and bullied."
		E4	"Students will miss school when they are afraid of being bullied."
		S2	"Children have said that they are being bullied."
	Understanding lessons	P6	"Sometimes students have missed school because they don't understand the lesson."
		E5	"Children get behind and are ashamed for not knowing the material taught."
	Negative communication	P3	"When teachers call the parent to complain about their child's behavior."
		S4	"Oftentimes parents feel unwelcome at school."
Exosystem	Homelessness/eviction	P5	"Some children are not at school because the family has been evicted and being homeless."
		E4	"Eviction for not paying rent."



## Appendix C: Open Codes, Categories, Participants, and Excerpts for Research Question 1

Open Codes	Categories	Participants	Excerpts
Needing a ride to school	Lack of transportation	E2	“Children miss the bus.”
		S4	“They keep the child home from school because they do not have a way to get them to school.”
Feeling ill	Sickness	P4	“My child will miss school when he has a stomach ache or fever.”
		E5	“Flu and strep throat outbreak during the fall of the year.”
		S1	“The parent will allow the child to miss school when the child says he/she is sick.”
Needing clean uniforms	Lack of means	P5	“Sometimes children are not at school because of dirty uniforms.”
		E4	“The uniforms that they have to wear are often dirty.”
Needing an alarm clock	Lack of means	P1	“I don’t have a clock to wake them.”
		E4	“They do not have an alarm clock.”
		S3	“Lack of a simple item as an alarm clock.”
Poor motivation to attend school	Poor motivation and an indifferent attitude	P1	“The child does not want to attend school.”
		E2	“The parent did not like school.”
		S3	“Parents will sometimes think missing school [is] not important.”
Abuse and drugs	Unsafe home environment	P5	“Hide scars from being abused.”
		E5	“Drug use will cause the child to be abused by parents.”

Open Codes	Categories	Participants	Excerpts
Parents' assistance at home	Poor parental assistance	P6	"Younger children need help."
		S4	"Parents rely on student to get ready."
Fearful school environment	Bullying	P1	"Being picked on by mean kids."
		E4	"They are afraid of being bullied."
		S4	"Bullying is a major issue."
Understanding lessons	Poor academic skills	P6	"Sometimes children have missed days from school and don't understand the lessons."
		E5	"Get behind and ashamed of not knowing material."
Negative communication	Unfavorable parent/teacher relationship	P3	"Parents will become upset when teacher calls job."
		E4	"Attitude will cause the parent to avoid child's teacher."
		S4	"Parents feel unwelcome at school by teacher."
Changing residence	Homelessness/eviction	P5	"Family has been evicted and homeless."
		E5	"Being evicted family faced financial problems."
		S1	"Family moving constantly for unpaid rent."

## Appendix D: A Priori Codes, Open Codes, Participants, and Excerpts for Research

## Question 2

A Priori Code	Open Codes	Participants	Excerpts
Microsystem	Parenting skills	P1	"Make sure child goes to bed on time."
		E5	"Parents need to encourage attendance at home."
		S1	"The district needs to hold parents accountable for the child's attendance."
	Teachers and students	P6	"Kids want to feel welcome."
		E2	"Look for patterns of absences."
		S3	"Address needs of students who are absent."
	Training about bullying	P1	"Listen to students when they have problems."
		E4	"Look for signs of bullying."
		S1	"Educate parents and teachers on signs of bullying."
	Teachers and awards	P5	"Give awards more frequently."
		E3	"Little children need short-term recognitions."
		S4	"Teachers provide awards often."
	Available resources	P4	"Have clothes and other items for students."
		E1	"Tell parents about agencies."
		S3	"Involve community and churches."
	Parent/teacher relationship	P6	"Should let parents know they care."
		E3	"Encourage parents to visit."
		S1	"Involve parents more in the child's education."

A Priori Code	Open Codes	Participants	Excerpts
	Alternate transportation	P2	"There should be a late van."
		P2	"There should be a policy for riding the late van."
		E6	"The school [should] acquaint parents without cars with parents with cars at the same school."
	Attendance policies	P4	"Handbooks should be given to parents."
		E5	"Educate parents on attendance policy for students."
		S1	"Workshops for educators and programs for parents."

## Appendix E: Open Codes, Categories, Participants, and Excerpts for Research Question 2

Open Codes	Categories	Participants	Excerpts
Parenting skills	Improve parental guidance	P2	“Have the child prepare for school the night before.”
		E3	“Letting them know that going to school helps with better grades.”
		S1	“Parents accountable for child missing school.”
Parent/teacher	Building positive relationships	P6	“Calling the parent to discuss child’s progress.”
		E3	“A rapport or relationship to help to improve attendance.”
		S1	“Communicate to parents the importance of the child attending regularly.”
Training about bullying	Educating parents and teachers about bullying	P1	“My child will come home and tell me that another child was bullying.”
		E3	“Signs that their child is being bullied.”
		S1	“Workshops on bullying.”
Teachers and awards	Educating teachers on positive reinforcement	P5	“Give compliments and awards.”
		E3	“Give weekly awards.”
		S4	“Provide awards often.”
Available resources	Educating parents and teachers about school and community resources	P4	“Closet with clothes of various sizes.”
		E1	“Tell parents about agencies.”
		S3	“Solicit clothes outside of school.”
Alternate transportation	Providing information about alternate transportation	P2	“Late van for students.” “Policy for late van.”
		E6	“Parents with cars at the same school.”

Open Codes	Categories	Participants	Excerpts
Attendance policies	Educating parents and teachers about attendance policies	P4	“Know about attendance policy.”
		E5	“Educate parents about attendance policies.”
		S1	“Attendance policies for district.”